

# JAMES MCNEILL WHISTLER IN CONTEXT

ESSAYS FROM THE WHISTLER  
CENTENARY SYMPOSIUM  
UNIVERSITY OF GLASGOW, 2003

Edited by Lee Glazer, Margaret F. MacDonald,  
Linda Merrill, and Nigel Thorp

FREER GALLERY OF ART  
OCCASIONAL PAPERS  
NEW SERIES, VOL. 2



SMITHSONIAN INSTITUTION  
WASHINGTON, D.C.

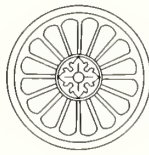






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NEW SERIES, VOL. 2

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WASHINGTON, D.C.

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Spelling and punctuation in letters to and from Whistler follow wherever possible that given in the online edition of his correspondence published by the University of Glasgow, [www.whistler.arts.gla.ac.uk/correspondence](http://www.whistler.arts.gla.ac.uk/correspondence)



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# Preface

The new series of the Freer Gallery of Art Occasional Papers began in 2003, with *Studies Using Scientific Methods: Pigments in Later Japanese Paintings* by Elizabeth West Fitzhugh, John Winter, and Marco Leona. As was true of the original series, which was inaugurated in 1947 under Archibald G. Wenley, director of the museum, this iteration of the Occasional Papers is intended to appeal primarily to specialist readers and to include a wide range of subject matter, methodologies, and formats.

This, the second volume in the series, moves from the realm of conservation science into art-historical inquiry, focusing on the American expatriate James McNeill Whistler (1834–1903). When the Freer Gallery of Art opened in 1923 as the first art museum in the Smithsonian Institution, it was largely the result of the mutual esteem and genuine friendship that had developed between Whistler and Charles Lang Freer, the American businessman and collector, who first introduced himself to the artist in an unannounced visit to his London studio in 1890. The relationship flourished, and in addition to aiding Freer in amassing what the artist called “a fine collection of Whistlers!! — perhaps The collection,” Whistler also inspired Freer to visit Asia, where, he explained, Freer would find artistic treasures — early chapters in what he called “the story of the beautiful” — from which his own art was descended. Eventually Freer’s collection and the museum that he founded would become primarily focused on the arts of Asia. Even so, Whistler’s work is still a significant presence in our galleries and his aesthetic philosophy permeates the entire museum. The Whistler collection at the Freer Gallery includes 130 paintings, 174 drawings, and 946 prints, and our archival materials range from press clippings and photographs to a significant body of correspondence between Whistler and Freer, first published by the Freer Gallery of Art and now part of the complete correspondence published online by the University of Glasgow.

This volume represents another collaborative effort between these two institutions. The essays published here were first presented at the University of Glasgow in 2003, at a symposium occasioned by the centenary of the artist’s death. Together, Glasgow and the Freer Gallery of Art hold the foremost collections of work by James McNeill Whistler and have worked together for many years with the common aim of furthering research on Whistler’s art and its historical significance. Nigel Thorp, who was director of the University’s Centre for Whistler Studies at the time of the centenary, is owed a large debt of gratitude for his unstinting devotion to promoting new scholarship and for encouraging Lee Glazer, the current curator of American art at the Freer and Sackler Galleries, to bring this long awaited volume to completion.

The collective wealth of our artistic and scholarly resources will doubtless inspire many more opportunities to enjoy Whistler's aesthetic vision and explore the complexity of his cultural contexts.

This volume was funded by a publications endowment established with a grant from the Andrew W. Mellon Foundation and by a generous donation from the Lunder Foundation.

Julian Raby  
Director

# Introduction

*Nigel Thorp*

In April 1903 the University of Glasgow conferred on James Whistler the honorary degree of Doctor of Laws, in recognition of his lifetime of outstanding artistic achievement. Whistler was then in failing health and was unable to accept the degree in person, but he was delighted at the honor, and in his letter of acceptance he drew attention to the Scottish ancestry that he claimed through his mother's family of McNeill. His connections with the city itself had begun as early as 1849, when, following his father's early death in Russia, the surviving Whistler family visited relatives and friends in England and Scotland before returning to live in the United States. Years later, in 1891, his portrait of Thomas Carlyle, *Arrangement in Grey and Black, No. 2* (see fig. 10.2), became the first of his paintings to enter a public collection when it was bought by the Corporation of Glasgow. With the subsequent gifts and bequest of his artistic, literary, and further estate to the university by his sister-in-law, Rosalind Birnie Philip, Glasgow has long been the primary focus in Europe for the study and appreciation of his work, and in recognition of this leading position it hosted an international conference to mark the Whistler centenary, organized by the Centre for Whistler Studies.

The Centre for Whistler Studies was launched in 1992 with the principal aim of editing the 10,000 letters in Whistler's correspondence, of which more than half are in Glasgow. The strong links already in place with the Freer Gallery of Art in Washington, D.C. were put on an established basis by a formal agreement in 1993 that allowed both institutions to join forces in developing this vital resource for the study of Whistler's work and influence. The first section of the online edition of the correspondence, covering 1855–80, was launched for the centenary in 2003, and that for the remaining period up to 1903 followed in 2004 ([www.whistler.arts.gla.ac.uk/correspondence](http://www.whistler.arts.gla.ac.uk/correspondence)). The formal agreements between Glasgow and Washington have continued in place and were renewed most recently in 2005, on the occasion of a visit to Glasgow by members of the Friends of the Freer Gallery. The Centre for Whistler Studies was closed in 2006 and work to correct and complete the Whistler correspondence, including following up on the remaining permissions needed for around 1,000 letters to be published in the online edition, is currently under way.

The centenary conference attracted outstanding contributions from a variety of international scholars, the majority of which are published in this volume. Whistler both copied works by other artists and was copied in his turn, and he

was concerned about similarities between his own paintings and those of others, such as Albert Moore. In the section on Whistler's style and subjects, Margaret F. MacDonald discusses questions of authenticity and attribution, of fact and fantasy, from technical, historical, and even mythical points of view. Monica Kjellman-Chapin provides a set of contexts in which Whistler's 1890s paintings of the female nude, long relegated to a subsidiary position in the artist's production, can be interpreted. All too often dismissed as less interesting than his "nocturnes," "symphonies," and "arrangements," these paintings were, on the contrary, of considerable importance to the artist, as evidenced both by his reluctance to part with them and by his emphasis on them in his correspondence with Charles Lang Freer and others.

The study of Whistler and his contemporaries still has much to reveal. Joanna Meacock explores his close connections with Dante Gabriel Rossetti from early 1863 onwards, examining not only Rossetti's encouragement and support of Whistler, but also the two artists' rather subversive use of religious language in both their paintings and writings. She compares Rossetti's early Marian images with Whistler's "white girls" of the 1860s in the context of the Aesthetic Movement's search for a new religion of beauty. Katharine Lochnan focuses on Whistler and Claude Monet, who followed parallel paths throughout the 1870s, working on related themes and exploring ephemeral effects. Their transition from Realism to Impressionism and their evolving aesthetic vision was stimulated by their joint interest in Turner and Japanese prints, and their names became synonymous with the Thames and the Seine respectively. Lochnan's essay investigates the nationalist and environmental subtexts inherent in their works, as well as the campaign which dominated the rest of Whistler's life — the introduction of French Impressionism into England, and the promotion of Monet as its greatest exponent. Whistler's influence on the pictorialist photographers of the 1890s and 1900s, who created a world-wide movement to posit photography as art, has been frequently remarked upon, but the discussion has been limited chiefly to stylistic or philosophical parallels. Lilly Koltun expounds the view that Whistler had a much more profound influence on this ambitious movement than is usually credited — not only in the direct imitation of artistic themes, compositions, and effects and the formulation of artistic philosophy and intent, but also, remarkably, the near-wholesale assumption of a new biographical template of public behavior.

From his early life onwards, Whistler was nothing if not an internationalist. Joy Newton examines Whistler's connections with the French writers, critics, and supporters whom he came to know in the 1880s and 1890s, when he again turned his attention to France after being disillusioned with his reception in Britain. A study of Whistler's relationships with individual members of this group reveals

the unstinting support they gave him, which contributed immensely to his establishment as a major artist on the Continent and in particular to the high acclaim and official recognition that he received in France. Whistler is known to have been profoundly inspired by Japanese art from an early date, and the Japanese influence has been frequently mentioned in the context of his artistic development. Ayako Ono explores the much less well-known fact that Whistler's works and his attitude as an artist had a great impact in Japan itself at the beginning of the twentieth century. This came about through the agency of Kaneko Kentaro, who studied at Harvard University with Theodore Roosevelt and with whom Whistler discussed Japanese art in London, and Iwamura Toru, who introduced Whistler to Japanese readers and art students. Grischka Petri looks behind the arguments over the style, color, and content of Whistler's nocturnes to the question of who had the right to define "art" in the context of a modern art market. Artists found themselves in competition for commissions, collectors, and patrons, when standards were no longer established by the Royal Academy but by a diversifying market. That Whistler's art seems so modern is therefore a consequence not only of its abstract qualities but also of the clear-sightedness with which he viewed the economic preconditions for artists, which have only changed quantitatively since his day, allowing us to see modernism as a term with more than purely aesthetic implications.

A different approach to Whistler's modernism is taken by Julian Hanna, who sees his *Ten O'Clock* lecture as the first important example of the modernist manifesto in Britain. Beginning with Whistler, the manifesto in Britain takes a radically different shape from the manifestos that advertise Continental artistic movements: it is individual rather than group-oriented, and reactive and iconoclastic rather than utopian and visionary. Unlike its counterparts in Germany or Italy, for example, the manifesto in Britain remains rooted in fin-de-siècle ideas of individualism and autonomy. Paradoxically, the manifesto form, while it is always inscribed with its political origins, is adopted by artists not to announce an art of increased praxis to daily life and social concerns but the very opposite — an autonomous art disengaged from social responsibility.

The apparent contradiction between the supposed idealism of Whistler's aesthetic theory and the materialism and self-promotion that accompanied his public legal battles inspired the novelist H. G. Wells to combine these themes within a single character in his novel *The Invisible Man* (1897), which can be seen as a satire on Whistler's flamboyant and contentious public persona. Robert Slifkin discusses the novel's critical portrait of Whistler as Aestheticist — a mercurial and elitist outsider whose experiments delve into the powers of visibility itself — against a background of the dangers of unregulated scientific progress, capitalism, and modernity in

general. He examines the correlation between the Victorian discourse of invisibility and Whistler's art, focusing on his series of "black" portraits, and showing how the concept of invisibility played a significant role in Whistler's aesthetic theory. As Daniel Sutherland argues, however, the biggest challenge to understanding Whistler's life is in penetrating the "Whistler myth," much of it created by the artist himself and subsequently sanctified in several early hagiographic biographies. Yet the key to plumbing this myth is not so much to dismantle or ignore it as to make it a rational part of the story. It would be foolish to accept old interpretations of Whistler's motives and actions uncritically, but it would be equally unwise not to employ his mystique as a powerful narrative tool, to tell, in other words, how and why the myth was created and shaped by the artist, his friends, and early biographers.

Linda J. Docherty's contribution to the study of Whistler's life explores his correspondence with his patron Isabella Stewart Gardner. When she conceived her idea for a museum in 1896 she owned more works by Whistler than by any other painter, and the Isabella Stewart Gardner Museum, which opened in the year of his death, attests to her continuing admiration for Whistler's achievement and her identification with him as a creator. Correspondence between Whistler and Gardner bears witness to the depth of their artistic sympathies, which were developed on her visits to his studio and by her purchases of works by him, as well as by their mutual enjoyment of dress and fashion. Recognition of the creative connection between painter and collector expands our view of the cultural significance of each. Georgia Toutziari, on the other hand, concentrates on the relationship between Whistler and his mother, Anna Matilda Whistler, illustrating the moralistic conversation between them, underlined by Anna Whistler's domestic and religious duties. It explores Anna's role in her son's artistic career, including the promotion and marketing of his work.

The centenary exhibitions of Whistler's work in Glasgow, Washington, and many other places provided a wonderful opportunity to see the range of his achievement, and these essays demonstrate the further range of responses and questions that his work still evokes. Whistler himself could write to David Croal Thomson, of the Goupil Gallery, "All facts concerning my work belong to history and are for publication of course" (August 15, 1895, Library of Congress, Pennell-Whistler Collection, GUW 08306; consulted 2007-08-31). The publication of the Whistler correspondence has been undertaken over the past twenty years out of the University of Glasgow's sense of responsibility to see one of its most important collections made available to the world at large, and we owe substantial thanks to the Freer Gallery for ensuring that the absorbing issues raised at the centenary conference can also now be shared in this publication.

# What is a Whistler?

Margaret F. MacDonald

In 1893 Whistler complained to the art dealer E. G. Kennedy that *The Chelsea Girl* (1884, private collection; YMSM 314) had been exhibited without his permission; it was not “a representative finished picture!” He added: “it is the sketch of one afternoon — or rather the first statement or beginning of a painting — I am not excusing it mind — ... of course it is a damn fine thing — only I should certainly never have proposed to send it to the Chicago place for the hordes of foolish people to look upon!”<sup>1</sup> Whistler’s definition of a “finished picture” in this case rates time (“one afternoon”) and finish (a “sketch”) above his subjective opinion (that it was a “damn fine thing”). This is curious, because in other cases he emphasized the unpremeditated and seemingly effortless freshness of his technique. Still, if anything is certain about Whistler it is his inconsistency, evident in the frequent clash between what he said about his work and what he actually did. For instance, Whistler’s largest drawing is a cartoon for the end panel in *The Peacock Room*, vigorously drawn in chalks and pounced (pricked) for transfer (pl. 1). Whistler later asserted that he had painted the entire *Peacock Room* without any previous preparation — no preliminary sketches, no cartoons, nothing, but this drawing shows clearly that the artist was not necessarily to be trusted in defining “What is a Whistler” or how it was created.<sup>2</sup>

Fortunately the artist is not the sole source of information, and there are all manner of records relating to most works of art. Whistler’s life and work are extremely well documented. Ten thousand letters, hundreds of books, thousands of articles, exhibition catalogues, and press cuttings, as well as the catalogues raisonné, constitute a huge body of information. Both the sitter and eyewitnesses recorded the creation of Whistler’s *Harmony in Flesh Colour and Black: Portrait of Mrs Louise Jopling* (fig. 1.1). E. W. Godwin noted that Whistler’s portrait was painted in two and a half hours on July 22, 1877: “An almost awful exhibition of nervous power and concentration.” Jopling herself remembered standing “for two hours without a rest.”<sup>3</sup> The broad brushwork, the working of wet on wet paint that produces the soft outlines in the dress, the subtle use of color (flesh-pink over black), are typical of

1 Whistler to E. G. Kennedy, [September 21, 1893], Edward Guthrie Kennedy Papers I/43, Manuscripts and Archives Division, New York Public Library, GUW 09710.

2 Pennell, *Life*, vol. 1, pp. 202–9.

3 Louise Jopling, *Twenty Years of My Life: 1867–1887* (London, 1925), p. 140.



FIG. 1.1 *Harmony in Flesh Colour and Black: Portrait of Mrs Louise Jopling*, 1877, ©Hunterian Art Gallery, University of Glasgow; YMSM 191.

Whistler's color schemes and technique in the late 1870s. Whistler, however, presumably considered it unfinished for he never exhibited his portrait. The sitter assumed it had been destroyed, and it is something of a mystery and a miracle that it survived Whistler's bankruptcy in 1879, to arrive in Glasgow in 1935 as the gift of the artist's sister-in-law, Rosalind Birnie Philip.

The equally striking *Portrait of Louise Jopling* by J. E. Millais (1879, National Portrait Gallery, London) was also recorded by the sitter: it was painted in five days in 1879, which was considered very fast indeed for Millais. As Jopling said, "I sat with the knowledge of a portrait painter. I knew that the better I sat, the sooner the work would be finished, and, also, the better the portrait would be."<sup>4</sup> Both artists clearly had a good relationship with the model; painting a very attractive woman who was also a fellow artist perhaps freed them from certain anxieties or perhaps inspired a competitive element. Both portraits

display a certain bravura in the brushwork, a sympathetic grasp of character and of the structure of fashionable dress, and a bold black-based color scheme. The two artists gained both an opportunity and inspiration to demonstrate their painterly skills, which resulted in a remarkable performance.

Such vivid, dated records of sittings are rare, and some models remain anonymous. Years later Whistler painted several portraits of one particular young woman, who had a pointed chin and puckered mouth, and a distinctive short hairstyle with a fringe. Two of these portraits, *Blue and Coral: The Little Blue Bonnet* (1897, private

<sup>4</sup> Ibid., p. 158.

collection; YMSM 500) and *Grey and Silver: La Petite Souris* (fig. 1.2), were exhibited at the International Society of Sculptors, Painters and Gravers in 1898 and were then, according to Whistler, “fresh from the easel.”<sup>5</sup> In November 2002 the Centre for Whistler Studies received an inquiry from a relative about a young artist called Muriel Smith who, as a student of Whistler’s, had posed for five paintings before marrying and emigrating to South Africa. “Muriel Smith” does not appear in Whistler’s correspondence, but in a long letter to Rosalind Birnie Philip on August 11, 1897, Whistler wrote, “I do hope the dress came out all right — pity I hurried you — for [I] find the abominable girl Muriel can’t come until Saturday.”<sup>6</sup> It seems that Muriel Smith was the “abominable girl” who posed for these five oils in 1897 or shortly

after, and perhaps studied under Whistler at the Académie Carmen in Paris from 1898 to 1901. The date fits the known history and visible technique of these works, with their gray primed canvas, extremely thin paint, the muted grays and blues with flashes of richer color, and the combination of broader washes with spiky, fine brushwork.

Walter Sickert, an earlier pupil of Whistler, considered Whistler’s subjects and techniques “a convenience for the forger”:

*He did countless sub-life-sized heads... of obscure untraceable young women.... [To] these the forger will have [easy] access, in biographies...*

*If he fumbled a passage he used... to take off the superfluous paint... by blotting the picture.... This... left the raised knots of canvas cleaner than those parts of thread that were on a lower level.*

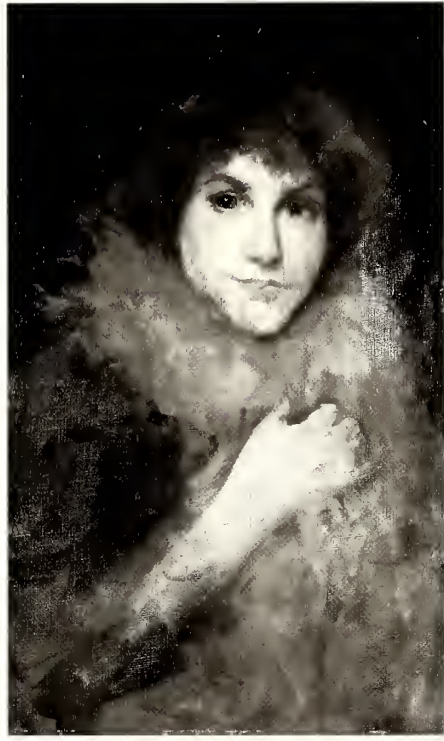


FIG. 1.2 *Grey and Silver: La Petite Souris*, 1897/98, ©Hunterian Art Gallery, University of Glasgow; YMSM 502.

<sup>5</sup> Exhibition catalogue, ISSPG, 1898 (cat. no. 182), quoted in YMSM 500. The same model appears in *Violet and Blue: The Red Feather* (ca. 1896–1900, Fogg Art Museum, Harvard University, Cambridge, Mass.; YMSM 503).

<sup>6</sup> Whistler to Rosalind Birnie Philip, [August 11, 1897], GUL P356, GUW 04716.



FIG. 1.3 Honorable Frederick Lawless, *Whistler in his Studio*, (detail) 1881/82; from Pennell, *Life*, vol. 2, following p. 10.

*Here we have a superficial appearance that can be produced by anybody.... As we are talking about Whistler forgeries, the presence of a decidedly ticked accent (e.g. under an eyelid) is a sign of deplorable ignorance of Whistler's most obvious characteristic, which was just the absence of accents.<sup>7</sup>*

There are elements of truth in Sickert's sweeping assertion, although there are occasionally "accents" in Whistler's small paintings, such as a masterful little watercolor, *Lady in Grey* (1883/84, Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York; M.933). Its technique, with thin, superimposed washes, flickering brushwork, and the occasional sharp accent, is typical of his 1880s watercolors; furthermore, its provenance is impeccable, being fully documented back to Whistler's time, when it was exhibited in Chicago in 1889. The pose and dress are similar to those seen in a tiny statuette of a woman, known only from a photograph of Whistler's studio in 1881 or 1882 (fig. 1.3). The statuette was one of a series called the "swaggerers," the product of collaboration between Whistler and the sculptor Waldo Story.<sup>8</sup> The statuettes were broken accidentally in transit and none seems to have survived. This is a reminder that Whistler's surviving oeuvre, some twenty-five hundred works, is not a complete record, and new discoveries remain to be made.

Technique, provenance, and documentation unite to confirm that the oil painting *Nocturne: Grey and Gold — Westminster Bridge* (fig. 1.4) is a Whistler. It has an almost perfect provenance going back to Whistler's description of it to the Liverpool

7 W. R. Sickert to the editor, *Evening News* (March 7, 1927), in Anna Greutzner Robins, ed., *Walter Sickert: The Complete Art Criticism* (Oxford, 2000), pp. 550–53.

8 Pennell, *Life*, vol. 2, following p. 10; MacDonald and Galassi, pp. 153–55.



FIG. 1.4 *Nocturne: Grey and Gold — Westminster Bridge*, 1871–74, Burrell Collection, ©Glasgow City Council; YMSM 145.

collector Alfred Chapman as a “very warm summer night on the Thames — lovely in colour ... view of the river from the Houses of Parliament.”<sup>9</sup> It has a full exhibition history; it suffered an accident in 1892, when a hole had to be repaired by Stephen Richards; and it stayed in one family until about 1920; then it disappeared for eight years, turned up at auction in London, and was snapped up by the great Glasgow collector William Burrell. Thus it is thoroughly documented, and it is certainly a Whistler, with perhaps a little help from the restorer. It is a wonderfully atmospheric painting, glowing with rich color, subtle gray-blue and deep, greenish blues set off by the massive dark tower. It is extremely simple in composition, and the paint is fairly thin and smoothed over. However, under raking light, there are traces of an earlier work and in particular, a boat or barge with a large sail at bottom right. This is confirmed by a vigorous pen sketch that shows the earlier composition, dominated by the curve of a sail. On the verso of the oil is a card, signed by Whistler in the mid-1870s, giving the title *Nocturne: Grey and Gold — Westminster Bridge*. The drawing was entitled *Souvenir of Nocturne in Blue and Gold / From Westminster Bridge* (1872–74, private collection; M.569), suggesting that the original painting might have experienced a slight change in the color balance, from gray to blue, possibly as a result of cleaning and varnishing. It is not clear if the drawing is really a “souvenir” (for it appears to date from much the same time as the painting), or records a stage in the development of the composition, but it is certainly a significant part of the documentation for the painting.

9 Whistler to Alfred Chapman, [June 1874/1875?], PWC 1/15/3, GUW 07901.



FIG. 1.5 *Copy after Ziegler's "La Vision de St Luc,"* 1858, ©Hunterian Art Gallery, University of Glasgow; YMSM 15.



FIG. 1.6 *Copy after a Snow Scene, 1857/58,* Colby College Museum of Art, Waterville, ME, Gift of Warren Adelson; YMSM 17.

If asked to pick out the two pictures least likely to be by Whistler, you might come up with subjects such as his *Copy after Ziegler's "La Vision de St Luc"* and *Copy after a Snow Scene* (fig. 1.5 and fig. 1.6). They were rediscovered in 2002, having been acquired many years ago by a Connecticut family from the descendants of one Captain Williams. This is a highly interesting provenance, since Whistler's biographers, the Pennells, record his descriptions of copies commissioned by a "Captain Williams of Stonington, Conn."<sup>10</sup> In 1858 Whistler requested permission to copy Jules-Claude Ziegler's *La Vision de St Luc*. The original had been bought by the state after the Salon of 1839 and had newly entered the Musée du Luxembourg on November 1, 1857. Its mixture of reverence and realism and its Hispanic flavor, reminiscent of Zurbarán, caught the public attention. When its popularity waned it went to the Musée des Beaux-Arts, Dunkirk. Edouard-Alexandre Odier's *Episode de la retraite de Moscou* (a large painting, ten by six feet [three meters by two], now in the Musée de Picardie in Amiens), had been shown at the Salon of 1833 as "Dragon de la garde impériale — étude." It was awarded a second-class medal and bought for the Luxembourg.<sup>11</sup>

<sup>10</sup> Pennell, *Life*, vol. 1, p. 72.

<sup>11</sup> Margaret F. MacDonald, "James McNeill Whistler," in Margaret MacDonald and Galina Andreeva, eds., *Whistler in Russia* (State Tretyakov Gallery, Moscow, 2007), pp. 16–57, repr. p. 21.

These two extremely early and atypical Whistlers contain clues to his future development. The Ziegler study was painted with sweeping brushstrokes that may well have influenced his later technique. The Spanish flavor and soft-edged brushwork of the *St. Luc* also find parallels in his later work. Both copies are signed (“Ziegler / Whistler” and “Odier / Whistler”). Similarly, Whistler’s only other surviving copy, *Copy after Ingres’s “Roger délivrant Angélique”* (1857, Hunterian Art Gallery, University of Glasgow; YMSM 11), is signed “Ingres / Whistler / Paris 1857” in red. Whistler intended there to be no doubt as to the status of his copies. The number of surviving paintings by Whistler from this period is very small indeed, and these works could not have been authenticated as by Whistler based on technique alone. The reappearance of these two copies makes a significant difference to our understanding of his early work. From his later career there are works in all media for comparison, and so technique joins documentation and provenance as the big three requirements for assessing a potential “Whistler.”

Whistler himself was downright antagonistic to the “expert,” whom he described in the *Ten O’Clock* lecture as “collecting — comparing — compiling — classifying — contradicting. Experts these — for whom a date is an accomplishment — a hall-mark, success!”<sup>12</sup> He was quite right: comparisons, documentation, signature, and provenance together confirm that the copies are likely to be by Whistler. None of these alone would be sufficient. If a work of art is discovered, years after it was created, its position in the established oeuvre of the artist must be convincingly fixed. Some artists (Lawrence Alma-Tadema, for instance) kept a record of their works, and Whistler (or rather his wife, Beatrice)<sup>13</sup> eventually kept check-lists of his etchings, but not of his work in other media.

As a result, his most famous works, or those that remained in his own studio, are often used as markers to establish a set of criteria to which other works can be related. *Arrangement in Grey and Black: Portrait of the Painter’s Mother* (see fig. 6.3) and *Nocturne in Black and Gold: The Falling Rocket* (see fig. 2.1) are so renowned that there can be no possible doubt of their authenticity. Ruskin and the *Whistler v. Ruskin* trial made *The Falling Rocket* famous or infamous and catapulted Whistler into the public eye. The sale of the *Mother* to the Louvre, and its exhibition in Europe and America, as well as later reproductions and cartoons, made it one of the best-known images of all time. These paintings have been recorded exhaustively and yet there are gaps in the history even of these pivotal works. It was only recently

<sup>12</sup> Whistler, *The Gentle Art*, p. 149.

<sup>13</sup> She was christened Beatrice Philip; in later life she became first Mrs. E. W. Godwin and then Mrs. James McNeill Whistler, exhibited paintings under the name “Rix Birnie” and signed herself over the years “Beatrice,” “Beatrice,” “Trix” and “Trixie.” [Editors’ note: the spelling “Beatrice” is used in the following essays in this volume.]

that an eyewitness account of the painting of Whistler's mother was discovered. Professor Terry Meyers pointed out a letter from Emilie Venturi to Algernon Swinburne that proves Whistler was working on what Venturi called a "full-length of his sweet old mother" on September 21, 1871; by November 3–4, the mother herself was reporting to her sister on the completion of the oil as we see it, which shows her seated, rather than full-length.<sup>14</sup>

The painting in the Musée d'Orsay is the only authentic oil portrait of Whistler's mother. There are at least two respectable copies of the *Mother* by other artists—one in the Whistler House Museum in Lowell, Massachusetts—and at least one watercolor copy of *The Falling Rocket* (private collection). These present no problem to the art historian or connoisseur because the technique and provenance of the originals is so securely documented. The technique, composition, and color of these paintings and other well-known and authenticated works help to define the style and technique of less-known or newly discovered works. Whistler's oeuvre is easier to arrange in groups than as a progressive sequence.

The relationships between works vary, but they form a network of associations that is important in establishing "What is a Whistler." So *Black Lion Wharf* (1859; K42) is established as a Whistler because it is included by that title in the earliest catalogues of Whistler's etchings during his lifetime; because it is signed and dated; and because it was published as part of his Thames Set of etchings in 1871. It is also recognizable in a painterly version on the studio wall in the equally famous and well-documented portrait of his mother (although she helped sell the Thames Set of etchings, she did not mention this work in her highly informative letters). Also on the wall in that portrait hangs a silver embroidered kimono; this, or something very like it, appears in some of Whistler's oriental subject paintings, such as *Variations in Flesh Colour and Green: The Balcony* (fig. 1.7), which Whistler's mother actually saw being painted. She described *The Balcony* to James H. Gamble as part of a group of "oriental paintings which are ordered & he has several in progress: One portrays a group in Oriental costume on a balcony, a tea equipage of the old China, the[y] look out upon a river, with a town in the distance."<sup>15</sup>

Over the years she noted seeing several works being painted or newly completed, and even recorded bringing paint tubes to Whistler as he painted *Nocturne: Blue and Silver—Chelsea* (see fig. 13.3): "the river in a glow of rare transparency an hour before sunset, he was inspired to begin a picture & rushed upstairs to his studio, carrying an easel & brushes, soon I was helping by bringing the several tubes of paint he pointed out that he should use & I so fascinated I hung over his magic

14 Margaret MacDonald, ed., *Whistler's Mother: An American Icon* (Aldershot, 2003), p. 54.

15 Anna McNeill Whistler to James H. Gamble, February 10–11, 1864, GUL W516, GUW 06522.

touches til the bright moon faced us from the window and I exclaimed oh Jemie dear it is yet light enough for you to see to make this a moonlight picture of the Thames.”<sup>16</sup> His technique in painting the river was described to his pupil Walter Greaves as the “waterman’s jerk” — that is, the sweep of the oars that carried a boat up the river — or his brush right across the canvas.<sup>17</sup>

The portrait of Whistler’s mother traveled to Liverpool to be admired by F. R. Leyland, purchaser of *La Princesse du pays de la porcelaine* (see pl. 4). Whistler’s descriptive brushwork in describing the design on the princess’s robe has distinct similarities to that on the

kimono worn by a woman in *The Balcony* and another hung on the wall behind Whistler’s mother. The *Princesse* is by Whistler, and its provenance is impeccable, but a similar subject, with a woman seen against an oriental screen, is more difficult to place. *Arrangement in Flesh Colour and Grey: The Chinese Screen* (1864–68, private collection; YMSM 51) has a complex history involving the wrecking and saving of paintings at the time of Whistler’s bankruptcy, and it seems at least questionable whether it is entirely by Whistler’s hand; indeed, the dealer Walter Dowdeswell admitted to Pennell that the screen had been repainted.

A highly finished pastel known as *The Lily* (pl. 2) is also difficult to fit into the established oeuvre of the artist. In some ways the level of finish, the fiddly detail of the robes, and the hard outlines suggest a work by Albert Moore rather than Whistler. It is signed with a precise butterfly similar to those drawn by Whistler around 1871/72, but this butterfly appears rather small in proportion to the whole sheet. Is it a drawing that Whistler overworked, or has it been touched up by another hand?



FIG. 1.7 *Variations in Flesh Colour and Green: The Balcony*, 1864/65, Freer Gallery of Art, Smithsonian Institution, Washington, D.C.: Gift of Charles Lang Freer; YMSM 56.

16 Anna McNeill Whistler to Catherine Jane (“Kate”) Palmer, November 3–4, 1871, PWC 34/67–68 and 75–76, G UW 10071.

17 Whistler to Walter Greaves, [November/December 14, 1871], PWC 9/645–46, G UW 11496.

More typical drawings of the period include studies for the portrait of Frances Leyland, such as *Mrs Leyland, Standing Holding a Fan* (fig. 1.8).<sup>18</sup> There is a hesitancy and delicacy in the lines that is quite different from *The Lily*. Whether the drawing is beautiful or not is irrelevant (although admittedly distracting) when considering the question of authenticity. The issue is whether the lines are similar in shape and pressure and length to those by Whistler.

An interesting painting known as *Selsey Bill* (New Britain Museum of American Art, Conn.) has a curious provenance involving the notorious entrepreneur Charles Augustus Howell, whose country retreat was at Selsey Bill on the West Sussex coast.<sup>19</sup> The painting has been radically restored and repainted. If it was eight by five inches

high (203 x 127 millimeters) it would probably have been included in the catalogue raisonné of Whistler's oils, but it is very large — two feet high (61 centimeters). The little figures, although like those in Whistler's small paintings of the early 1880s, are much less like those in his larger works. Is there some explanation for this? Further technical examination of this painting may well help to establish if there is a Whistler struggling to get out of it.

In 1927 Walter Sickert rashly offered to give free opinions on Whistlers. He was inundated with enquiries and wrote to *The Times*, "A business bringing in regular, if small, profits to the manufacturers, and large ones to those who 'pass' the forgeries, cannot easily be stopped.... It is easy to pass forgeries of (1) slight or (2) incomprehensible paintings."<sup>20</sup> In the Pennell-

FIG. 1.8 *Mrs Leyland, Standing Holding a Fan*, 1871–74, Freer Gallery of Art, Smithsonian Institution, Washington, D.C.: Gift of Charles Lang Freer; M.432.



18 See Susan Grace Galassi, "Whistler and Aesthetic Dress: Mrs. Frances Leyland," in MacDonald and Galassi, pp. 92–115.

19 See Frederick A. Sweet, *James McNeill Whistler: Paintings, Pastels, Watercolors, Etchings, Lithographs* (Art Institute of Chicago, 1968), cat. no. 10.

20 *The Times* (March 14, 1927, and July 25, 1927), in Robins, Sickert, pp. 553–54, 558–59.

Whistler Collection in the Library of Congress there is a photograph of a drawing that fulfils Sickert's definition, being "slight or incomprehensible." The original has not been located, but it was apparently a rough pen sketch related to Whistler's drawings of F. R. Leyland's youngest daughter, Elinor, dressed as a "blue girl." It may have been based on two drawings owned by Howell, and there is a possibility that it was drawn by Howell's comrade-in-arms, Rosa Corder, a copyist and portrait painter. Whether it was intended as an exercise or a downright fake is impossible to tell. Whistler's own drawing of the young Elinor (fig. 1.9) is jerky and angular, with areas of zig-zag shading. It may not be "finished," but it makes sense, and much more sense than the somewhat dislocated figure shown in the photograph. The people who were in the best position to fake Whistlers were undoubtedly those closest to him. The better they were as artists (like Rosa Corder), the better the copy or the forgery. If the owners were close to Whistler, the provenance may appear better than it really is. In fact, the Pennell-Whistler Collection houses two more copies of Whistler's drawings of Elinor Leyland in a letter from Pickford Waller to the Pennells.<sup>21</sup> Waller, who had a nice line in cartoons and copies, would be another candidate for the creation of the "fake" drawing of Elinor.

There are times, however, when a perfect provenance is just that — perfect. Another drawing of *Elinor Leyland* (1873–75, private collection; M.544) was rejected by one museum because its provenance sounded too good to be true; yet it came from the family of Ione Franklin, daughter of Whistler's mistress Maud Franklin, and it bore F. R. Leyland's monogram. It was, additionally, distinctive in its technique, the angular lines and shading being similar to those seen in other drawings of the period.<sup>22</sup>



FIG. 1.9 Study for "The Blue Girl: Portrait of Miss Elinor Leyland," ca. 1879, The Bryan Lathrop Collection, The Art Institute of Chicago; Photography ©The Art Institute of Chicago; M.717.

21 Pickford R. Waller to Elizabeth R. and Joseph Pennell, [1905/1908], PWC.

22 Personal information from the Barneclutt family; Ione Franklin documents have been given by descendants to GUL. The drawing is similar to *Mrs Leyland* (1873–75, private collection; M.545).

Drawings such as *Sketch after the Portrait of Rosa Corder* (1879, Art Institute of Chicago; M.715) and *Study for "Arrangement in Black: Lady Meux"* (1881, Art Institute of Chicago; M.850) show Whistler at his most confident, with a springy, wiry line that summarizes the essence of the figure, the pose, the dress, color, and texture. Both these drawings were returned to Whistler in the 1890s for signature, and although the double signatures might at first seem confusing, they are fully documented.<sup>23</sup> Whistler sometimes signed works years later, but he never added earlier versions of his signatures to later works. The butterfly was a signature, and it evolved throughout his life.

Not only did Whistler sign works later, but he sometimes reworked pictures twenty years later. One pastel (a draped, elongated figure with flowers, in a private collection) dating originally from the early 1870s, was reworked with a new model, the stunning Eva Carrington, at the time of his renewed interest in pastel in the 1890s. It is based on one of a series of women with flowers, such as *Note in Flesh-Colour Gold — The Golden Blossom* (fig. 1.10). As a result, such a drawing displays features of Whistler's work in both the seventies and nineties.

Some works display the strong influence of other artists. Obviously Whistler was not creating art in a vacuum; there were people working beside him in the studio or on the streets. In the late sixties the style and subject, technique and compositions of Albert Moore and Whistler converged to a point that worried Whistler (see 2. *Framing Whistler's Nudes*, p. 26). *Venus* (fig. 1.11) is in technique and scale so like the drawings of Moore that were it not signed (with the first dated butterfly, of 1869), it would be practically impossible to tell them apart.

FIG. 1.10 *Note in Flesh-Colour Gold — The Golden Blossom*, 1871–73, ©Hunterian Art Gallery, University of Glasgow; M.402.



23 E. G. Kennedy to Whistler, June 9, 1891, GUL W1180, GUW 07192.



FIG. 1.11 *Venus*, 1869, Freer Gallery of Art, Smithsonian Institution, Washington, D.C.: Gift of Charles Lang Freer; M.357.



FIG. 1.12 *A Nude Binding up Her Hair*, 1869/70, ©Hunterian Art Gallery, University of Glasgow; M.352.

Such similarities worried Whistler so much that he made a conscious attempt to change completely his subject matter and his working methods.

From about 1870, Whistler, his pupils Walter and Henry Greaves, and many others attended Victor Barthe's life-drawing classes in London. According to the Pennells, the Greaves brothers sat beside Whistler and drew from Whistler rather than the model. Not surprisingly, there are Greaves drawings, such as *A Seated Nude* (Hunterian Art Gallery, University of Glasgow) that look remarkably like Whistler's, such as his *A Nude Seated in Right Profile* (1871–74, Hunterian Art Gallery, University of Glasgow; M.417). Whistler's *Nude Binding up Her Hair* (fig. 1.12) must also have been drawn at Barthe's classes, where on this occasion Whistler apparently sat beside William Morris. Morris's drawing is

extremely like Whistler's, suggesting an unexpectedly close association.<sup>24</sup>

Another chalk drawing, said to be a portrait of Walter Greaves — artist and boatman, and a neighbor of Whistler's — could be a drawing by Walter, or it could be a drawing by Whistler.<sup>25</sup> It is hard to tell, though it has a certain stiffness that suggests Greaves. Another portrait, this time of Whistler, is now in Chelsea Arts Club. Since it is a drawing of Whistler it has been assumed — wrongly — to be by him.<sup>26</sup> It could be by Greaves or — and this is perhaps more likely — by a later follower of Whistler, the Australian-born artist Mortimer Menpes. In this case, the weakness of the long lines of the underdrawing seem to me totally unlike Whistler's shorter, broken outlines. Furthermore, the forcefulness of the head actually makes Whistler's authenticated self-portraits appear surprisingly modest. It should be emphasized that these drawings are not fakes — they merely present problems of attribution.

To take another case study, the Fogg Art Museum at Harvard University has an impressive holding of Whistler pastels, including *Nude Reclining* (ca. 1878; M.684). Another pastel in the collection, *Reclining Nude*, formerly attributed to Whistler, is certainly not by him. The weak and meaningless nature of the outlines suggests that it is an outright fake — but it could be an example of work by a student. However, the student or forger was incompetent, and failed to suggest the anatomy of the figure with a few broken, undulating lines, as a more experienced artist would have done.

It is much easier to recognize the distinctive style of a mature artist. It is surprising, therefore, that in 1881 two artists who should have been familiar with Whistler's work, Alphonse Legros and Whistler's brother-in-law, Francis Seymour Haden, apparently mistook etchings by the American artist Frank Duveneck for those of Whistler.<sup>27</sup> Whistler responded that he and Duveneck had been friends in Venice and worked on similar subjects — but that was all. The heavily etched lines of Duveneck's prints were actually very different from Whistler's finer, wiry lines, and Haden was forced to admit that he had been mistaken.

A lesser-known artist, Jerome Elwell, was also in Venice with Whistler, and

24 This drawing, in a private collection, was exhibited at the Victoria & Albert Museum in 1996 but not reproduced in the accompanying catalogue; however, for a comparable study, see the exhibition catalogue *William Morris* (London, 1996), fig. 45. Whistler's drawing was dated 1868/69 in M.352, where I also implied, incorrectly, that it might be a drawing of Joanna Hiffernan; given the close resemblance to Morris's drawing, it may date from slightly later.

25 See *Portrait of Walter Greaves* (1871–75, Rhode Island School of Design, Providence; M.421).

26 See Tom Cross, *Artists and Bohemians: 100 Years with the Chelsea Arts Club* (London, 1992), repr. frontispiece.

27 See, for example, Frank Duveneck, *View of Slipping from the Riva* (1880, etching, Hunterian Art Gallery, GLAHA 20547 (illustrated on <http://www.huntsearch.gla.ac.uk>); Whistler, *San Giorgio* (1880, etching; K.201 II); Margaret F. MacDonald, *Palaces in the Night: Whistler in Venice* (Aldershot, 2001), p. 96; and Marc Simpson, "Venice, Whistler, and the American Others," in Merrill, *After Whistler*, pp. 34–36.

Whistler undoubtedly influenced his work.<sup>28</sup> He worked in pastel on brown paper, as did Whistler, and he developed a monogram that subsequent entrepreneurs have changed to resemble Whistler's signature. This unfortunately turns Elwell's pleasant drawings into fakes. Harper Pennington — another American who met Whistler in Venice — likewise evolved a Whistlerian monogram from his initials "HP" (either as a line drawing within an ellipse, or as a silhouette, filling in the blanks between the letters). He painted small Whistlerian panels, particularly nocturnes and portraits of women that were presumably not intended as forgeries but are constantly mistaken for Whistler's work.<sup>29</sup>

As Sickert pointed out, it is particularly difficult to define exactly what constitutes a Whistler when the work under consideration is extremely slight or sketchy. Works that imitate quick sketches like the studies in Whistler's Dutch sketchbook can easily be mistaken for real Whistlers. For instance, there are several simple watercolors that are said to have come from Clifford and Inez Addams, Whistler's pupils and apprentices; these may have started as respectful studies but have come on the market as being by Whistler.<sup>30</sup> The Addams family was not necessarily to blame for this!

How can you tell a few strokes of pastel in such sparing studies as *Clouds and Sky, Venice* (1880, The Saint Louis Art Museum, Mo.; M.820) from similar minimalist strokes by another artist? Without the help of additional provenance this is difficult. Furthermore, the provenance may be incomplete or misleading, and associated documents or "authentications" are not necessarily proofs. Indeed, proof may not be possible. Walter Sickert authenticated a number of works as by Whistler, including a pastel, *Studies of Poppies* (ca. 1886, private collection; M.1109). Sickert was in and out of Whistler's studio in the 1880s, he worked with and for Whistler, and copied and studied Whistler's work. The drawing of poppies, fine and decorative as it is, is hard to fit into Whistler's oeuvre since all his other flower studies have disappeared. I included it in the drawings catalogue raisonné, but it would be hard to prove definitively that it was by Whistler.

Sickert commented, years later, that he and Whistler had each worked on portraits started by the other, and made variations of the same subjects, such as *Arrangement in Grey: Portrait of Master Stephen Manuel* (fig. 1.13). "I painted a sketch of the blue girl, actually taking the mixtures off Whistler's palette. I etched a plate from Stephen Manuel while he was sitting to Whistler. My etching is good for me, being done in

28 See MacDonald, *Palaces*, pp. 29–30.

29 H. Pennington, *Sketch of Whistler* and "Evolution of his signature," reproduced in Pennell, *Whistler Journal*, following p. 202.

30 See, for instance, Inez Addams, *Seascape* (watercolor, private collection; photograph in GUL) and Whistler, *Sketchbook* (of Holland), ca. 1887, Hunterian Art Gallery, University of Glasgow; M.1144.



FIG. 1.13 *Arrangement in Grey: Portrait of Master Stephen Manuel*, 1885, Freer Gallery of Art, Smithsonian Institution, Washington, D.C.: Gift of Charles Lang Freer; YMSM 321.

once, Whistler's portrait was bad for him. He was not quick enough for the child, who was wearied with the number of sittings."<sup>31</sup> Sickert etched Beatrice Godwin as she posed for *Harmony in Red: Lamplight* (1885/86, Hunterian Art Gallery, University of Glasgow; YMSM 253). In his etching she looks younger and broader than in the painting, and his line has something of the wiriness of Whistler's — a quality that Sickert eliminated in later etchings in favor of firm outline and a rectangular grid of shading.

Beatrice Godwin had joined Sickert and the team of art students in Whistler's studio, where a distinct studio style developed. In 1888 Beatrice and James were married; Whistler taught her to etch, and a particular use of outline and shading

(short lines, wiry broken outlines, areas of parallel shading) is characteristic of both at this time.<sup>32</sup> The Whistlers shared models, and faced with a similar range of color, almost identical materials, and the same subject, it can be difficult to distinguish the productions of master and pupil. There are a number of works in my Whistler drawings catalogue raisonné that I am now sure are by Beatrice.<sup>33</sup> Her paintings can be distinguished only by her slightly smaller, softer, rounded brushstrokes, and her

31 *New Age* (June 15, 1911), in Robins, *Sickert*, p. 284.

32 See, for instance, James McNeill and Beatrice Whistler, *Loches* (1888, drypoint, Hunterian Art Gallery, University of Glasgow).

33 Among the works that may be by Beatrice Whistler are *Heads and Figures* (probably 1886, GUL; M.1097 side 4); *Woman's Head* (1887, E. R. & J. Pennell Collection, Prints and Photographs Division, Library of Congress, Washington, D.C.; M.1130); *Lady Playing the Piano and Ship in a Storm* (ca. 1888, private collection; M.1190); *The Prediction* (ca. 1888, private collection; M.1192); *Woman in a Dress with a Long Train* (1888–90, Hunterian Art Gallery, University of Glasgow; M.1196); *Head of a Man in a Cap* (ca. 1890 [?], GUL; M.1316); *Tall Woman with a Short Man* (1892, GUL; M.1325); *Study for "Rose et argent: La Jolie Mutine"* (ca. 1892, Hunterian Art Gallery, University of Glasgow; M.1326); *Heads of Man and Woman* (ca. 1892, GUL; M.1336); *A House, An Arch, and Steps Leading Up to a Wrought-Iron Balcony* (1892, GUL; M.1338); *Head, Coffee-Pots and Glassware* (ca. 1892, Hunterian Art Gallery, Glasgow; M.1345v); *Fireplace* (1892, GUL; M.1348); *The Kitchen Studio Stove and Study of a Head, and Shading* (ca. 1892, Hunterian Art Gallery, University of Glasgow; M.1349); and *Head of a Woman* (1893, GUL; M.1362).

draftsmanship by the use of longer, smoother, curving lines.<sup>34</sup>

Whistler's pupils (including Beatrice, Sickert, Menpes, and Theodore Roussel) learned by copying not only his precepts but also his work, worked from the same models, and printed his etchings, so that they had a broad training in Whistler's technique. Roussel at times comes amazingly close to Whistler's work in his studies of Hettie Pettigrew, model and sculptor.<sup>35</sup> The restrained sensuality of the Pettigrew sisters appealed strongly to Roussel, Whistler, Philip Wilson Steer, and the *Punch* cartoonist Linley Sambourne, among others.<sup>36</sup> In a pastel known as *The Arabian* (1890–92, Hunterian Art Gallery, University of Glasgow; M.1273), Whistler loaded Hettie with artifacts appropriate to her exotic, gypsy looks, and produced a highly finished pastel, which is not exactly “typical,” in that it represents the furthest development of a particular strand in his work.

Beatrice's younger sister, Ethel Birnie Philip, was not a professional model but she became an experienced one, and posed to various photographers as well as to both Beatrice and Whistler. She is a somewhat shadowy figure but she collaborated in and inspired



FIG. 1.14 *Red and Black: The Fan*, 1891–97, ©Hunterian Museum and Art Gallery, University of Glasgow; YMSM 388.

34 See Beatrice Whistler, *Miss Pettigrew* (1892–95, oil, Hunterian Art Gallery, University of Glasgow); and *Rose Pettigrew Reading* (drypoint, Hunterian Art Gallery, University of Glasgow, GLAHA 50210). See Margaret E. MacDonald, *Beatrice Whistler, Painter and Designer* (Glasgow, 1987) and the Hunterian Art Gallery's website, <http://www.huntsearch.gla.ac.uk>.

35 See Roussel's *Study from the Nude, Figure Reclining* in Margaret Dunwoody Hausberg, *Prints of Theodore Roussel: A Catalogue Raisonné* (San Francisco, 1991), cat. no. 175, pp. 209–10.

36 Philip Wilson Steer, *Rose Pettigrew*, in D. S. MacColl, *Life, Work and Setting of Phillip Wilson Steer* (London, 1945), repr. facing p. 37. Photographs of Rose and Hettie Pettigrew by Linley Sambourne are in the archives of the Royal Borough of Kensington and Chelsea, Linley Sambourne House.

some of their most interesting work. Beatrice made small sketches and paintings of Ethel, while Whistler drew a number of lithographs of her, and a series of major full-length portraits such as *Red and Black: The Fan* (Fig. 1.14).<sup>37</sup> Over the years, collectors and dealers tried desperately to buy it, but Whistler refused to sell, as he worked and reworked it, and eventually it came with the Birnie Philip Bequest to the University of Glasgow in 1958.

So — what is a Whistler? Of course *Red and Black* is a Whistler: provenance, documentation, technique, photographs, the model herself, all confirm its authenticity. However, it is the subtle complexity of the brushwork, the rich harmony of color, the fascinating and somewhat ambivalent details of dress, the sheer beauty of it that continue to fascinate me. This is a Whistler, and in works like this, Whistler was a master of his craft.

<sup>37</sup> Photographs of Ethel Philip, GUL, PH1/50–53. See also MacDonald, “Love and Fashion: The Birnie Philips,” in MacDonald and Galassi, pp. 185–298.

# Points of Context and Contact: Framing Whistler's Nudes

Monica Kjellman-Chapin

This essay articulates a set of frames within which James McNeill Whistler's late paintings of the female nude might be viewed. These paintings, begun in the 1890s, have long been relegated to a subsidiary position in the artist's production and tacitly dismissed as less interesting, innovative, and ambitious than other works that are identified with Whistler's aesthetic radicality. Nevertheless, in the last decade of his life he produced multiple paintings of the female nude; he also mentioned them frequently in his correspondence with fellow artists and with his patron Charles Lang Freer, revealing a sustained and considered engagement with the subject that suggests that these frequently marginalized paintings are thoroughly saturated sites of signification. Whistler seems to have regarded these images as important participants in the project of his legacy, and a redress of the much earlier, ambitious but abandoned figural paintings known collectively as the Six Projects.

The dominant interpretation of Whistler's position in the history of Western art is as radical *isolé*, rebel aesthete, and champion of *l'art pour l'art*. The repetitive nudes of the 1890s, however, with their tentative and uncertain facture, threaten to destabilize the mythic Whistler who stands as prescient of twentieth-century abstraction. The yoking of Whistler to abstraction occurs courtesy of the Ruskin trial, which would appear to be the defining moment of Whistler's career—it is mentioned in virtually every account of the history of nineteenth-century painting, especially in surveys of the century, where brevity is requisite, glossed in an eminently familiar narrative form.<sup>1</sup> The Ruskin trial's importance in the formation of Whistler should certainly not be underestimated, but the persistent reiteration of this event has the associated effect of funneling emphasis on that particular moment of Whistler's career, and on the work, *Nocturne in Black and Gold: The Falling Rocket* (fig. 2.1), which precipitated the libelous remarks in the first place. In a synecdochal operation frequent in art-historical discourse, this work has become virtually synonymous with Whistler, as it is

<sup>1</sup> See Robert Rosenblum and H. W. Janson, *19th-Century Art* (Englewood Cliffs, N.J., 1984); Petra ten-Doesschate Chu, *Nineteenth-Century European Art* (New York, 2003); George Heard Hamilton, *Painting and Sculpture in Europe, 1880–1940*, 6th ed. (New Haven, Conn., 1993); and Wayne Craven, *American Art: History and Culture* (Madison, Wisc., 1994).



FIG. 2.1 *Nocturne in Black and Gold: The Falling Rocket*, 1875, Detroit Institute of Arts, Gift of Dexter M. Ferry Jr.; YMSM 170.

regularly used both as a visual sign of the Ruskin trial, and as most representative of the artist's mature style—a conception that is itself invented and unstable. What happens is that the “nocturne”—a term habitually used generically, as if all paintings bearing that word in their title were identical and interchangeable—stands as the crowning achievement of Whistler's career. Indeed, Whistler's nocturnes are so much a part of his artistic legacy and identity that John Siewert recently remarked, “No aspect of... Whistler's work has been more readily associated with his name than the paintings he called Nocturnes.... For better or worse, the Nocturnes became and remain Whistler's signature: images as un-

derstated as his public persona was overdetermined.”<sup>2</sup> The focus on the nocturnes, particularly as prophetic of subsequent abstract painting, enables art historian John Wilmerding to remark that *The Falling Rocket* “could almost pass as an Abstract Expressionist painting of the 1950s.”<sup>3</sup> Pierre Schneider wittily played upon another of Whistler's best-known paintings when he wrote in 1961 that “if Monet was the father of lyrical abstraction, Whistler was assuredly its mother.”<sup>4</sup> The attention given to the moment of the trial and *The Falling Rocket* also marginalizes a group of works that do not conform to the formalist standards of canonical modernism; in fact, it excises nearly thirty years of work.

This late period, however, is particularly interesting. The female nude was not a new subject for Whistler, but in the 1890s he bestowed upon it a singularity of focus that had not been present before. The imagery also became more repetitive, with a consistency in the poses, proportions, and general disposition of the figures. The similarities across the

2 John Siewert, “Rhetoric and Reputation in Whistler's Nocturnes,” in Merrill, *After Whistler*, pp. 64–73 (at pp. 64–65).

3 John Wilmerding, *The Genius of American Painting* (New York, 1973), p. 168.

4 Pierre Schneider, “Art News from Paris: Enemies and a Gentle Art,” *Artnews* 60 (Summer 1961), p. 20.

canvases suggest a certain amount of urgency in the act of pictorial iteration, as does the state of formal irresolution of many of the paintings. If Whistler was intent on using figurative painting as part of a bid to lay claim to a reputation and status that had eluded him thus far, he could not have chosen a more loaded subject than the female nude, which, despite the stylistic plurality that characterized the second half of the nineteenth century, was still considered the most exalted subject of art.<sup>5</sup> Yet it would appear from scholarly assessments that the urgency of Whistler's insistent pictorial restatement has resulted in something approximating mediocrity.

In the catalogue to the Hunterian Art Gallery's exhibition *Beauty and the Butterfly* (2003), Pamela Robertson confronted the issue of quality, noting that the "figurative pastels, though small in scale, have a powerful presence," but that Whistler "failed to match the quality of his small-scale pastel drawings in the few, larger oils of female nudes from the 1890s."<sup>6</sup> Linda Merrill concurs, writing that in the case of *Harmony in Blue and Gold: The Little Blue Girl* (pl. 3), the painting "conveys the uncomfortable impression of an artist whose reach has exceeded his grasp."<sup>7</sup> Given the prevalence of the nude as rendered by his predecessors and contemporaries, Whistler's figural attempts might be seen as derivative, as lacking in originality; moreover, they might be seen as technically faulty, the bodies anatomically so. He was certainly no stranger to charges of faltering draughtsmanship, of a lack of proficiency in rendering the human body pleasingly or even correctly. He reprinted some of these criticisms in the *Gentle Art of Making Enemies*, including the charge that he was "an artist who [had] never mastered the subtleties of accurate form," as well as the pronouncement that his "figure drawings [are] generally defective and always incomplete."<sup>8</sup> Even William Michael Rossetti, who generally had praise for Whistler's compositions, found fault with his figure studies, and the architect Frederick Jameson, with whom Whistler shared a studio in 1868, recounted to the Pennells that Whistler "knew his powers, of course, but he was painfully aware of his defects—in drawing, for instance."<sup>9</sup> Historical as well as contemporary criticism, then, takes issue with Whistler's figural essays; the tonal nocturnes and symphonies do not suffer such unevenness and seem a safer bet on which to base Whistler's aesthetic legacy and proto-abstractionist. Yet the late paintings of the nude, all begun

5 Lynda Nead, *The Female Nude: Art, Obscenity and Sexuality* (London, 1992); Marcia Pointon, *Naked Authority: The Body in Western Painting 1830–1908* (Cambridge, England, 1990); Alison Smith, *The Victorian Nude: Sexuality, Morality and Art* (Manchester, 1996); and Alison Smith, *Exposed: The Victorian Nude* (London, 2001).

6 Pamela Robertson, *Beauty and the Butterfly. Whistler's Depictions of Women: Pastels, Etchings and Lithographs* (Hunterian Art Gallery, 2003), p.13.

7 Linda Merrill, in Thomas Lawton and Linda Merrill, *Freer: A Legacy of Art* (Washington, D.C., 1993), p. 46.

8 Whistler, *The Gentle Art*, pp. 98 and 101.

9 William Michael Rossetti, *Fine Art, Chiefly Contemporary* (London, 1867); Pennell, *Life*, vol. 1, p. 148.



FIG. 2.2 *Purple and Gold: Phryne the Superb! — Builder of Temples*, 1898, Freer Gallery of Art Smithsonian Institution, Washington, D.C.: Gift of Charles Lang Freer; YMSM 490.



FIG. 2.3 *Rose and Brown: La Cigale*, ca. 1898, Freer Gallery of Art, Smithsonian Institution, Washington, D.C.: Gift of Charles Lang Freer; YMSM 495.

in and worked on throughout the 1890s, and many of them still in the artist's studio upon his death in 1903, make it difficult to sustain the interpretations of Whistler that spring so readily to mind and which are so textually prevalent.

The late nudes have, of course, been critically addressed in some detail. David Park Curry, for instance, has eloquently argued that Whistler's oils, pastels, watercolors, and drawings of the nude or diaphanously draped female figure from the 1860s through the 1890s have an underlying commonality. The thread that binds these images together, according to Curry, is the eighteenth-century painter Antoine Watteau.<sup>10</sup> Like Robertson and Merrill, however, Curry notes a qualitative difference between the works, stating that "of all of Whistler's late figure studies in various media, the pastels are perhaps the most successful"; and that, compared to

10 David Park Curry, *James McNeill Whistler at the Freer Gallery of Art* (Washington, D.C., 1984), pp. 35–51.

the deft touch of his more confectionary rococo predecessor, Whistler's paintings, such as *Purple and Gold: Phryne the Superb! — Builder of Temples* (fig. 2.2), have an "overworked quality."<sup>11</sup> And to be sure, it does appear overworked, and so do many, if not most, of the nudes of the 1890s, such as *Rose and Brown: La Cigale* (fig. 2.3) or *The Little Blue Girl*, which is all but destroyed by Whistler's repeated scraping and repainting. The face of the *The Little Blue Girl* is virtually obliterated, the head marred by blotched paint and puckered canvas, the limbs atrophied and amputated, the surface cracked and fissured and scabrous. Overworked, in this case, would seem a radical understatement.

As an analogue to Curry's assessment of the *Phryne* we might turn to Bailey van Hook's overview of women and art in the Gilded Age. She calls Whistler's late paintings of the nude "rather unambitious works," and says that those such as the *Phryne* represent "a kind of nostalgic longing for youth by an aging artist."<sup>12</sup> This psychological projection suggests a degree of illegibility in the works themselves: the capacity of the paintings to signify beyond their maker is perhaps hindered by the visible overworking that characterizes them. Van Hook's attribution of a "nostalgic longing" to a painter in the later phase of his career intimates that the *Phryne* — and other, similar pictures — is legible primarily as a record of autobiographical, wistful yearning but does not clarify the object of desire, nor why there might be such a confluence of "nostalgia," "age," and the female nude. Similarly, one might ask what makes the *Phryne* or any of these late nudes "unambitious," especially given their protracted gestation and overworked surfaces, which suggest preoccupation and even obsession; clearly these nudes were central to Whistler's artistic concerns in the 1890s.

The late nudes' palimpsestic surfaces thwart critical analysis and prompt a question: What did Whistler think an ambitious nude looked like? And related to that interrogative are others: Why would Whistler persist, pursue so tenaciously the painting of the nude, especially after coming to some state of resolution, if not unequivocal success, with that subject in other media?<sup>13</sup> What might he have wished from them? What roles were they expected to play? These questions suggest an alternative avenue of interpretation for the role of the late nudes in Whistler's oeuvre. One source for this approach can be found in Whistler's correspondence with his fellow artists and with his patron, Charles Lang Freer. Their letters reveal that nudes such as *Phryne*, *La Cigale*, and *The Little Blue Girl* must be understood in relation to

11 Ibid., p. 50.

12 Bailey van Hook, *Angels of Art: Women and Art in American Society, 1876–1914* (University Park, Penn., 1996), p. 164.

13 Nicolas Burry Smale, "Venus Transformed: Lithographs and Pastels of the 1890s," *The Whistler Review: Studies on James McNeill Whistler and Nineteenth-Century Art* 2 (2003), pp. 27–36; see also Curry, *Whistler at the Freer*, p. 50; and Robertson, *Beauty and the Butterfly*, p. 13.

one another and as the result of a deliberate and dialogical exchange with the nudes of other less self-conscious artists. The letters, like the overworked surfaces, reveal that these paintings were not meant to be seen on their own, but rather in relation to, and in active engagement with, a host of other images, ideas, and cultural contexts. Many points of context and contact are suggested by Whistler's works and words alike; by mapping such a visual and critical landscape against which the late nudes might be viewed, we begin to see them less like nostalgic aberrations and more like highly significant contributions to his oeuvre.

With the *Phryne*, there are obvious points of contact along a continuum of representations, including Jean-Léon Gérôme's *Phryne before the Areopagus* (1861, Kunsthalle, Hamburg), shown in England in 1866. Joseph Mallord William Turner, Edward Armitage, and Frederic Leighton, to name just a few, all depicted some aspect of the myth of the legendary fourth-century B.C.E. courtesan reputed to have been the mistress of Praxiteles and the model for his celebrated Aphrodite of Knidos, as well as modeling for the painter Apelles.<sup>14</sup> For all of these artists, the myth of Phryne was only a pretext, a convenient vehicle for manifold references and comments, and this is how the subject functioned for Whistler. Through his depiction of Phryne, he could make multiple allusions, not only to immediate contemporaries and predecessors, but also to the legitimizing power of the classical past. No matter that Whistler's reference to antiquity is nominal — aside from a vaguely articulated peristyle, there is very little within this picture that speaks directly of classicism; it is not to be found in either the pose or the proportions of the figure. But by the time Whistler painted his *Purple and Gold: Phryne the Superb! — Builder of Temples*, the iconography of the courtesan was accessible to audiences because of familiarity with prior works. Long before the 1866 exhibition of Gérôme's version, English viewers might have seen Turner's interpretation of the Phryne-as-Venus myth, exhibited at the Royal Academy in 1838.<sup>15</sup> Closer in time to Whistler's painting is Leighton's large-scale *Phryne at Eleusis* (whereabouts unknown), shown at the Royal Academy in 1882, following (and possibly responding to) the appearance of Armitage's equally monumental *Phryne* (whereabouts unknown), also at the Royal Academy in 1876.<sup>16</sup> Whistler's *Phryne* is thus legible within a context where authority and authenticity are granted by recourse to antiquity; the evidence of ambition, however, is not in the reference to a distant classical past (which is negligible), but

14 Christine Mitchell Havelock, *The Aphrodite of Knidos and Her Successors: A Historical Review of the Female Nude in Greek Art* (Ann Arbor, Mich., 1995), pp. 42–50 and pp. 130–31.

15 J. M. W. Turner, *Phryne Going to the Public Bath as Venus — Demosthenes Taunted by Æschines*, Tate Britain, Turner Bequest 1856.

16 A. Smith, "Nature Transformed: Leighton, the Nude and the Model," in Tim Barringer and Elizabeth Prettejohn, eds., *Frederic Leighton: Antiquity, Renaissance, Modernity* (New Haven, Conn., 1999), pp. 31–34.

in the relationship to a more immediate generation of artistic precursors.

If scale is a measure of ambition, the *Phryne* comes up short, as it stands just over 23 by 13 centimeters (9 by 5½ inches). Whistler had plans, however, to enlarge the painting. The large-scale versions never materialized, and *Phryne* remained only in her diminutive state. According to the Pennells, Whistler defended the work's size, asking, "Would she be more superb — more truly the Builder of Temples — had I painted her what is called life-size by the foolish critics who always bring out their foot-rule? Is it a question of feet and inches when you look at her?"<sup>17</sup> Indeed, the small scale of the work did not prevent Whistler from exhibiting it twice: in 1901 at the exhibition of the International Society of Sculptors, Painters and Gravers and again the following year at the Société Nationale des Beaux-Arts. His exhibition of this painting at both British and French venues demonstrates his longstanding strategy for maintaining a significant presence in both countries, and represents another aspect of his ambition for this painting of the female nude. Moreover, *Phryne* was destined for the United States even prior to those shows, as it was likely one of the paintings that Charles Lang Freer had decided to purchase in 1900.<sup>18</sup>

Two years earlier, Whistler had written to William Heinemann that he had a whole group of female nudes in his studio, the *Phryne* among them: "I have now in the studio a Phryne — a Danae [*sic*] — an Eve — an Odalisque — and a Bathsheba."<sup>19</sup> *Phryne* and her proposed satellites might be seen as a revisiting of the Six Projects, a group of unfinished oil sketches that preoccupied Whistler at the end of the 1860s. According to the Pennells' biography of the artist, the Six Projects may have been conceived as part of an interior design scheme for Frederick Leyland, although the project never materialized.<sup>20</sup> All featured diaphanously dressed women and were characterized by subtle color harmonies. A variety of sources have been suggested as inspirations for the Six Projects, including Japanese prints, particularly those of Torii Kiyonaga (1752–1815), the draped figures on the Elgin Marbles, installed at the British Museum in 1865, Tanagra figurines of the second and third centuries B.C.E., and rococo depictions of *fêtes galantes*.<sup>21</sup> Whistler was never able to resolve them into finished compositions and the paintings haunted much of his

17 Pennell, *Life*, vol. 2, p. 206.

18 Charles Lang Freer to Whistler, June 27, 1900, GUW 01518; Linda Merrill, ed., *With Kindest Regards: The Correspondence of Charles Lang Freer and James McNeill Whistler, 1890–1903* (Washington, D.C., 1995), pp. 127–29.

19 Whistler to William Heinemann, [January 31, 1898], PWC 10/849-50/1, GUW 10803. See also YMSM 491.

20 Pennell, *Life*, vol. 1, p. 149.

21 Allen Staley and Theodore Reff, *From Realism to Symbolism: Whistler and His World* (New York, 1971), pp. 14–15, 44; Curry, *Whistler at the Freer*, pp. 44–45; Deanna Marohn Bendix, *Diabolical Designs: Paintings, Interiors, and Exhibitions of James McNeill Whistler* (Washington, D.C., 1995), pp. 99–102; YMSM 82–87.



FIG. 2.4 *The White Symphony: The Three Girls*, ca. 1868, Freer Gallery of Art, Smithsonian Institution, Washington, D.C.: Gift of Charles Lang Freer; YMSM 62.

subsequent production. After the Six Projects, Whistler's work became increasingly self-referential as he began to mine his own imagery for inspiration; and he would have found his return to certain of the ideas that had prompted the series validated by the classical revival that made Phryne, and other somatic signifiers of antiquity, a topical subject for representation once again at the end of the nineteenth century.

The Six Projects, only one of which — *The Three Girls* (fig. 2.4) — made it to any state of resolution, brought Whistler into close visual proximity with the work of Albert Moore, whom he had met in 1865. *The Three Girls* is clearly indebted to Moore's *Pomegranates* of 1866, and the similarities prompted Whistler to write to his friend to express his concern that their work had veered too close to one another's both visually and conceptually.<sup>22</sup> They agreed that the architect William Eden Nesfield was to arbitrate the matter; Nesfield reassured Whistler that there was no cause for concern.<sup>23</sup>

In addition to the influence of Moore, the Six Projects may also have been

22 See Whistler to Albert Moore, [September 12/19, 1870], GUL M436, GUW 04166.

23 William E. Nesfield to Whistler, September 19, 1870, GUL N20, GUW 04263.

sparked by Whistler's contemporaneous rethinking of Ingres. In a frequently cited letter to fellow painter Henri Fantin-Latour, Whistler rephrased the *paragone* or comparison between *disegno* and *colore* — already gendered in its rhetoric — in explicitly gendered terms, describing color as a temptress that led him astray. This association was undoubtedly informed by the writings of the French theorist Charles Blanc, who stated unequivocally that “drawing is the masculine side of art, color the feminine.”<sup>24</sup> Blanc was not only following the dictates of the language (*la couleur* and *le dessin* are already gendered in French) but was also participating in and perpetuating a metaphorical legacy of tremendous longevity. One can find in ancient treatises references to the devaluation of color, which was subsequently aligned with the feminine pole of the binary organized around sexual difference, particularly during the Renaissance.<sup>25</sup>

At the same time, Whistler vehemently rejected the influence of Gustave Courbet, calling the Realist's impact upon his work “disgusting,” denouncing it as having made “an immediate appeal” to his “vanity as a painter,” and declaring instead his new allegiance to the linearity of Ingres: “Ah! how I wish I had been a pupil of Ingres! ... What a master he would have been — How soundly he would have guided us — drawing!”<sup>26</sup> Although it is difficult to find clear visual evidence of Ingres's influence in the Six Projects, the ideals of Ingres, as Whistler explained to Fantin, would help him master the feminine wiles of color, which had been “treating her unfortunate companion like a duffer who bores her! which is just what he does! and the result is there to be seen: a chaos of intoxication, of trickery, of regrets — of unfinished things!”<sup>27</sup> The work of both Ingres and Moore, then, which was far more linear than Whistler's, could function as a necessary and masculinizing corrective. Without their example, Whistler believed that he would continue to be at the mercy of the capricious, abusive, irresistible, and ultimately emasculating vice of color.

Whistler scholars agree that the Six Projects were of tremendous importance to the artist: the paintings emerge as a formative failure in his career. In the 1890s, prior to starting work on the series of which the *Phryne* was a part, Whistler sent five of the Six Projects out to be cleaned, indicating the longevity and persistence of their presence for him, as well as signaling that they were once again very much on his mind as he embarked on another ambitious set of paintings of nude or partially draped

24 Charles Blanc, *Grammaire des arts du dessin*, trans. Kate Newell Doggett (New York, 1874), p. 169.

25 Patricia O'Reilly, “The Taming of the Blue: Writing Out Color in Italian Renaissance Theory,” in Norma Broude and Mary D. Garrard, eds., *The Expanding Discourse: Feminism and Art History* (New York, 1997), pp. 87–99.

26 “Ah! que n'ai-je été un élève de Ingres! ... Quel maître qu'il aurait été — Comme il nous aurait sainement conduit — le dessin!” Whistler to Henri Fantin-Latour, [September 1867?], PWC 1/33/25, GUW 08045.

27 “traitant son malheureux compagno[n] comme un beta qui la gene! ce qui du reste est vrai aussi! — et le resultat se voit: un chaos de griseries de tricheries, de regrets — de choses incompletes!” Ibid.

female figures. Curry has noted that the *Phryne* is “something of a reprise, combining several of the leitmotifs that run throughout Whistler’s oeuvre,” and the catalogue raisonné of Whistler’s oils, following the biography by Elizabeth and Joseph Pennell, called attention to the “curious mixture of biblical, Oriental, and mythological subjects” comprising the proposed suite of paintings of which *Phryne* was to be part.<sup>28</sup> Whistler’s expressed intention to make paintings of *Phryne*, *Bathsheba*, *Eve*, *Danaë*, and an *odalisque*, as well as potentially a *Judith* — as part of a series that was to be significantly enlarged — might be seen as constituting more than a reprise.<sup>29</sup> As a group of works they might be viewed as a revisiting of the Six Projects and the ambitions loaded into that undertaking. More than thirty years of his practice, then, might be framed by two series that take the female body as their subject.

Certainly, *Harmony in Blue and Gold: The Little Blue Girl* occupied a place of personal significance equal to the Six Projects. Whistler spent nine years working on it, painting and scraping and repainting over and over in a palimpsestic process that has resulted in pronounced scarification. Despite Freer’s payment and repeated requests for it, the painting remained with Whistler until his death, and the artist’s inability to part with it, indeed to leave it alone, is palpable. The letters exchanged between the two men give an indication of the importance both attached to *The Little Blue Girl*; often they spoke of the painting, and the figure within it, as if she were an actual girl, and Freer asked after her frequently, signaling his eagerness to have the painting in his possession. Freer wrote of Whistler’s female nudes, “when I saw them . . . [I] instantly lost my heart [to them].”<sup>30</sup> Whistler told the collector, “I am delighted . . . to know that my little Blue Girl is to be always in your care!”<sup>31</sup> Freer inquires if she is soon to come to him and asks after her readiness to travel; Whistler assures him that his “little ‘Blue and Gold Girl’ is doing her very best to look lovely” for him.<sup>32</sup> Freer was eager to have *The Little Blue Girl* join *La Cigale*, which Freer referred to as “a great gem.”<sup>33</sup> As late as 1901, Freer was writing, “And the ‘Little Blue Girl’ how is she? and when may I take her to reign in her future home?”<sup>34</sup>

Part of Freer’s eagerness to obtain *The Little Blue Girl* was that he understood

28 Curry, *Whistler at the Freer*, p. 153; YMSM 490; Pennell, *Life*, vol. 2, p. 206.

29 See further YMSM 491, 493.

30 Charles Lang Freer to Whistler, [December 24, 1896], GUL F466, GUW 01534; see also Merrill, *Kindest Regards*, p. 111.

31 Whistler to Charles Lang Freer, November 23, 1894, Freer Gallery of Art, Washington, D.C., Whistler 37/2, GUW 03195; Merrill, *Kindest Regards*, p. 102.

32 Whistler to Charles Lang Freer, [March 24, 1897], Freer Gallery of Art, Washington, D.C., Whistler 38, GUW 11571; Merrill, *Kindest Regards*, p. 113.

33 Charles Lang Freer to Whistler, June 27, 1900, GUL F450, GUW 01518; Merrill, *Kindest Regards*, p. 123.

34 Charles Lang Freer to Whistler, July 21, 1901, GUL F456, GUW 01524.

the importance of the collection he was building. Whistler himself had suggested its significance in a letter to the Detroit industrialist in 1899, writing that Freer should not worry about payment until *The Little Blue Girl*, then five years in the making, “takes her place to preside.”<sup>35</sup> In Freer, Whistler realized his stated dream of having his paintings become active agents in the telling of the “story of the painter’s reputation,” as he had once put it in a letter to Henry Studdy Theobald.<sup>36</sup> Whistler expressed to Freer that, as he was discontented with the fact that “the Englishmen have all sold . . . whatever paintings of mine they possessed,” he wished for the American industrialist to have “a fine collection of Whistlers!! perhaps The collection —.”<sup>37</sup> Through Freer, not only could Whistler shape the plot, characters, and outcome of the story of his reputation, he could also export that narrative to another country.

For Whistler, this must have seemed like the realization of an ambition voiced many years before. In 1865, shortly after making the acquaintance of Albert Moore, Whistler wrote to Fantin suggesting that Moore replace Alphonse Legros, then on bad terms with Whistler, as the third member of the *Société des trois*, an informal group formed in 1858 for the purpose of mutual support as well as the promotion of one another’s work in England and France. His concern was not with the preservation of the society as a group of three, but something far more grandiose: “it’s good to see in this way,” he writes, “Russia England and America each providing a continuation of the true traditions of painting in the 19th century.”<sup>38</sup> Although the reference to Russia is odd in the context of the *Société de trois*, at the Ruskin trial, Whistler claimed that though he was “of American parentage” he had been born in St. Petersburg, Russia; thus, the inclusion of Russia in the nationalities of the society of three may refer to Whistler himself.<sup>39</sup> The sentiment of a continuation of traditions is echoed in the later letter to Fantin quoted above, in which Whistler wrote that despite his admiration for Ingres, “I feel there’s much further to go! much more beautiful things to do.”<sup>40</sup> By the time Whistler and Freer were collaborating on a permanent and comprehensive collection of the expatriate’s work, this long-held ambition may at last have seemed a potential reality. Whistler could continue the

35 Whistler to Charles Lang Freer, [July 29, 1899], Freer Gallery of Art, Washington, D.C., Whistler 40, G UW 03196.

36 Whistler to Henry Studdy Theobald, April 25, 1888, Department of Prints and Drawings, British Museum, London, Alexander volume 59-11-14-6, G UW 09668.

37 See note 35 above.

38 “c’est jolî de voir ainsi la Russie l’Angleterre et l’Amérique fournir chacune une continuation des vraies traditions de la peinture au 9me. siècle [sic].” Whistler to Henri Fantin-Latour, August 16, [1865], PWC 1/33/1, G UW 11477.

39 Merrill, *Pot of Paint*, p. 141 and p. 362 n.8.

40 “Je sens qu’il y a bien plus loin à aller! de choses bien plus belles à faire.” See note 26 above.

great traditions of nineteenth-century painting, but was now in the unique position of doing so alone, the sole representative extending the pictorial traditions of France, England, and America.

Among the works Whistler was eager to see included in this story of the painter's reputation, and that Freer was keen to have in his possession, were these very same nudes that all too often have been relegated to a subsidiary position in the artist's production. In Whistler's letters there is a consistent enough verbal and visual emphasis on the female body as a signifier of artistic worth to make us reconsider the tacit dismissal of these late paintings as "nostalgic" or "unambitious," or irrelevant to Whistler's art-historical contribution to modernism. Surely the *Phryne* is in fact encumbered with too much ambition, overworked on the surface and overburdened for its diminutive frame. The same might be said of the other nudes produced during the same period; they all suffer under the weight of Whistler's ambitions.

For Whistler, the nudes as much as the nocturnes would establish him in the canon of art history. The nudes' play of associations, references, and inferences was intended to allow Whistler to write himself into a privileged lineage, heir to the French and British traditions and primogenitor of an American one. Rather than a looking back, as nostalgia implies, these nudes were to be the summit and summation of Whistler's career, his ticket to an everlasting and fully deserved place in history, founded on the terms and the subject dictated by nineteenth-century standards, tastes, and expectations. The story of the painter's reputation would tell the tale of an artist fully inscribed into tradition. Whistler was concerned that this story might conclude without the production of a monumental nude that was both evocative of the academic manner and transformed by his own belief in art for art's sake. These images propose a Whistler who wanted to be British, French, and American, master of tradition and modernism, last and first.

# Apostles of the New Gospel: Whistler and Rossetti

Joanna Meacock

The relationship that existed between James McNeill Whistler and Dante Gabriel Rossetti in the 1860s and 1870s was a fascinating one of friendship, camaraderie, rivalry, generosity, emotional support, and reciprocal artistic influence. Their first recorded meeting was in July 1862 at a party hosted by the poet Charles Algernon Swinburne, who was to move in with Rossetti at Tudor House, 16 Cheyne Walk, Chelsea, later that year. When Whistler moved to 7 Lindsey Row, Chelsea, in March 1863, Rossetti and he saw each other almost daily. This was a period of intense aesthetic experimentation for Whistler, who had recently cast off the Realism of Gustave Courbet and was searching for a fresh artistic identity and a new way of painting. Rossetti encouraged and supported Whistler in this quest. Plans were made in 1863 for Whistler, Rossetti, Alphonse Legros, and Henri Fantin-Latour to open an exhibition together, and on February 3, 1864, Whistler suggested to Fantin that Rossetti be included in his *Homage to Eugène Delacroix* (1864, Musée d'Orsay).<sup>1</sup>

In the 1860s Whistler and Rossetti famously competed over who could collect the largest and rarest collection of oriental porcelain, but in general their friendship was more congenial than combative. Rossetti generously supported and promoted the younger artist in many aspects of his life and work. When Whistler went to Valparaíso in March 1866, Rossetti was appointed executor of Whistler's will, along with the solicitor James Anderson Rose.<sup>2</sup> He was entrusted to look after a selection of Whistler's paintings during this absence, including a number of sea views, possibly *Harmony in Blue and Silver: Trouville* (see pl. 18) and *Crepuscle in Opal: Trouville* (1865, Toledo Museum of Art, Ohio; YMSM 67).<sup>3</sup> While they were in his studio Rossetti took the opportunity to show them to potential clients. A year later D. G. and W. M. Rossetti magnanimously stood up for Whistler when he was expelled from the Burlington Fine Arts Club in December 1867. They wrote to the secretary of the club, Rodolph Nicholson Wornum,

1 Daphne du Maurier, ed., *The Young George du Maurier: A Selection of Letters, 1860–67* (London, 1951), p. 216.

Whistler to Henri Fantin-Latour, January 4 to February 3, 1864, PWC 1/33/15, GUW 08036.

2 Whistler to James Anderson Rose, January 31, 1866, PWC, GUW 11483.

3 Anna McNeill Whistler to Whistler and William McNeill Whistler, January 22, 1866, GUL W521, GUW 06527.



FIG. 3.1 D. G. Rossetti, *Sir Lancelot's Vision of the Sanc Grael*, unfinished study, 1857, Ashmolean Museum, Oxford.

to request an official apology, presented a petition to the club's committee, and ultimately resigned in protest.<sup>4</sup>

Whistler and Rossetti shared patrons, including Rose; the Newcastle collector James Leathart; the print-seller Ernest Gambart; the decorative-art dealer Murray Marks; the Birkenhead bank manager and collector George Rae; Frederick Huth, father of the collector Louis Huth; and the Liverpool shipping magnate Frederick R. Leyland. They also shared dealers, publishers, models, and studio space. In 1869 Rossetti was asked to write about Whistler's etchings for a published edition of the *Thames Set*.<sup>5</sup> When he refused, he was asked to design the folio.<sup>6</sup> In 1871 the edition was published by Rossetti's publisher, F. S. Ellis of King Street, Covent Garden. Their friendship was a complex and beneficial association. However, the intention of this paper is to focus on a single aspect of the two artists' creative exchange, their mutual development of a religious vocabulary of aestheticism.

Early in his career Rossetti showed a marked interest in monasticism, the legends of the saints, Catholic ritual and ceremony, and the writings of the Church

4 Dante Gabriel Rossetti to Rodolph Nicholson Wornum, June 14, 1867, Victoria and Albert Museum, London, National Art Library, PC12/6 MSL/1952/1353/2/6/6, G UW 12964. Whistler to William Boxall, December 24, [1867], GUL, B281, G UW 00498.

5 D. G. Rossetti to Charles Augustus Howell, [February 15, 1869?], Harry Ransom Humanities Research Center, University of Texas, Austin, G UW 12857.

6 Helen Rossetti Angeli, *Pre-Raphaelite Twilight: The Story of Charles Augustus Howell* (London, 1954), pp. 54–55. C. A. Howell to William Michael Rossetti, [18 February 1869], G UW 12862.

Fathers, which had seen a resurgence in popularity in the wake of the Oxford Movement. He was especially attracted to the merging of saintly and sensual experience within Catholic legend, particularly the idea of spiritual marriage.

In his 1857 Oxford Union mural *Sir Lancelot's Vision of the Sanc Grael* (fig. 3.1), Rossetti made subtle use not only of scriptural texts but also medieval writings, transforming the theology of these to a secular context: Guinevere appears not only as an Eve-like figure of temptation, as recognized by Coventry Patmore, but as a Christ-figure crucified, suggesting love's capacity for redemption.<sup>7</sup> Rossetti followed this up with a proposal for a poem, "God's Graal," which, as he wrote to Swinburne on March 9, 1870, was intended to "emphasise the marked superiority of Guenevere over God."<sup>8</sup> Swinburne himself was of course making blasphemous allusions to Christian martyrdom and redemption in his own poetry, forming an interesting parallel with Rossetti's increasingly subversive paintings and poems.

Rossetti's treatment of secular subjects was affected at a fundamental level by his familiarity with Christian imagery. *Venus Verticordia* (fig. 3.2), an erotic image that draws on the iconography of the Virgin, Venus, Eve, and Saint Teresa, purposefully exploited the format of a religious icon. Its decorative surface, ambiguous space, and gold nimbus created what was essentially a new and powerfully sensual votive image, with suffocating colors, crowding symbols and the pungency of suggested odors.<sup>9</sup> *The Blessed Damozel* (1875–78, Fogg Art Museum, Harvard University), a painting described by Alfred Gurney as "an exposition of the spiritual signification of Mary," with its Marian iconography of lilies, roses, stars, and palms, was essentially an altarpiece to beauty and sensual love.<sup>10</sup>



FIG. 3.2 D. G. Rossetti, *Venus Verticordia*, 1864–68, Russell-Cotes Art Gallery, Bournemouth.

7 Coventry Patmore, "Walls and Wall Painting at Oxford," *Saturday Review* (December 26, 1857), pp. 583–84.

8 William Fredeman, ed., *The Correspondence of Dante Gabriel Rossetti*, 8 vols. (London, 2002–), vol. 4, p. 394.

9 Joanna Meacock, "The Image of the Apple in Dante Gabriel Rossetti's *Venus Verticordia*," *Inferno: St Andrews Journal of Art History* 5 (1999), pp. 36–46.

10 Rev. Alfred Gurney, *A Dream of Fair Women* (London, 1883); D. M. Bentley, "The Blessed Damozel: A Young Man's Fantasy," *Victorian Poetry* 20 (Autumn–Winter 1982), pp. 31–43 (at p. 38).

Rossetti's mature theories on the nature of physical love were bound up with notions of a supernatural encounter with a godhead. Regarding love as sacramental, he continually returned to the theme of music, which for him symbolized all that was mystical and divine. Analogies can be made with the writings of Christian mystics, who utilized the evocative power of music in order to describe their transcendental encounters.<sup>11</sup> It is an enticing aside to consider Whistler's musical references from this perspective.

Rossetti's artistic output was also influenced by Swedenborgian theory and by spiritualism, particularly the phenomena of spirit writing and drawing. In the 1860s Whistler attended séances at Rossetti's home at which there was table-turning, spirit-rapping, planchette, and mesmerism.<sup>12</sup> The Pennells noted that Whistler believed in the supernatural nature of these gatherings,<sup>13</sup> and Alan Summerly Cole's diary shows that Whistler continued to evince such a belief into the 1870s.<sup>14</sup> Thus, despite Whistler and Rossetti's reputations for bohemian, worldly lifestyles and their position within Aestheticism, a movement primarily concerned with the senses, with surfaces, and with decoration, both men created works of art that were suggestive of something beyond the tangible and empirical world. Indeed, I would argue that the Aesthetic Movement as a whole was more spiritual in its heritage, artistic direction, and influence than has often been recognized.

Whistler's *Symphony in White, No. 1: The White Girl* (fig. 3.3) can be seen as a secular annunciation inspired by Rossetti's *Ecce Ancilla Domini!* (fig. 3.4). Certainly Rossetti thought so, writing to Frederick George Stephens on April 25, 1874: "In point of time it is the ancestor of all the *white* pictures which have since become so numerous."<sup>15</sup> Contemporaneously, Whistler's painting was described by Courbet, according to Fantin, as "an apparition, spiritualistic."<sup>16</sup> Swinburne saw "sad & glad mystery" and "phantoms" in *Symphony in White, No. 2: The Little White Girl* (fig. 3.5), inspiring him to write a poem: Linda Merrill suggests that Rossetti was behind this collaboration.<sup>17</sup> The critic Tom Taylor termed Whistler's full-length arrange-

11 Joanna Meacock, *Saintly Ecstasies: The Appropriation and Secularisation of Saintry Imagery in the Paintings and Poems of Dante Gabriel Rossetti*, Ph.D. diss., University of Glasgow, 2001.

12 Henry Treffry Dunn, *Recollections of Dante Gabriel Rossetti and his Circle (Cheyne Walk Life)*, ed. Rosalie Mander (Westerham, 1984), pp. 46–48.

13 Pennell, *Life*, vol. 1, pp. 110, 115.

14 Alan Summerly Cole's diary, March 12, 1876, PWC 281/557–87, GUW 13132.

15 Virginia Surtees, *The Paintings and Drawings of Dante Gabriel Rossetti (1828–1882): A Catalogue Raisonné* (Oxford, 1971), p. 14.

16 Henri Fantin-Latour to Whistler, [May 15, 1863], GUL F12, GUW 01081.

17 Algernon Charles Swinburne to Whistler, [April 2, 1865], GUL S265, GUW 05619. Merrill, *Peacock Room*, p. 65.



FIG. 3.3 *Symphony in White*, No. 1: *The White Girl*, 1861/62, Harris Whittemore Collection, Image ©Board of Trustees, National Gallery of Art, Washington, D.C.; YMSM 38.

FIG. 3.4 D. G. Rossetti, *Ecce Ancilla Domini!*, 1849/50, Tate Britain, London, ©2007.



FIG. 3.5 *Symphony in White*, No. 2: *The Little White Girl*, 1864, Tate Britain, London, ©2007; YMSM 52.

ments “materialized spirits.”<sup>18</sup> *Arrangement in Black: Lady Meux* (1881, Honolulu Academy of Arts, Hawaii; YMSM 228) was described as “ghost-like” by J.-K. Huysmans and “mysterious” by Théodore Duret.<sup>19</sup> Susan Galassi connects the “greater purity of design” in Whistler’s late black portraits with a desire to depict something of the spiritual side of the sitter.<sup>20</sup>

Furthermore, Whistler’s ethereal nocturnes can be seen to be evocative of some kind of primordial mist. His choice of musical titles enhances the otherworldliness of his pictures. Both Whistler and Rossetti were familiar with the writings of Edgar Allan Poe, who recognized that it was in music “that the soul most nearly attains the great end for which, when inspired by the poetic sentiment — it struggles — the creation of supernatural beauty.”<sup>21</sup>

It is worth considering the extent to which Whistler, like Rossetti, attempted to challenge the Christian canon, and with it his religious upbringing (on which see 13. *Whistler and His Mother*), expressing a new spiritual devotion to a more enigmatic world of beauty. He appeared to consider that his works compared with and even surpassed images of the Christian faith. He wrote to his sister-in-law Nellie Whistler from Venice in 1880: “I went to a grand high mass in St Marc’s and very swell it all was — but do you know I couldn’t help feeling that the Peacock Room is more beautiful in its effect! — and certainly the glory and delicacy of the ceiling is far more complete.”<sup>22</sup> St. Mark’s was the most important religious shrine in Venice, being a building of impressive scale and decorative grandeur and the focus of the city’s spiritual life.<sup>23</sup> In volume two of *The Stones of Venice* (1853), Ruskin portrayed the basilica as a vision rising out of the earth, comparable to the description of the New Jerusalem in Revelation:

*A multitude of pillars and white domes, clustered into a long low pyramid of coloured light; a treasure-heap, it seems, partly of gold, and partly of opal and mother-of-pearl, hollowed beneath into five great vaulted porches, ceiled with fair mosaic, and beset with sculpture of alabaster, clear as amber and delicate as ivory, — sculpture fantastic and involved, of palm leaves and lilies, and grapes and pomegranates, and birds ... and round the walls of the porches there are set pillars*

18 Merrill, *Pot of Paint*, pp. 179–80.

19 Joris-Karl Huysmans, *Certains* (Paris, 1908), p. 66; Théodore Duret, *Histoire de J. McN. Whistler et de son oeuvre* (Paris, 1904), p. 94; MacDonald and Galassi, p. 169.

20 MacDonald and Galassi, p. 119.

21 E. A. Poe, “The Poetic Principle,” *The Literati* (New York, 1850), pp. 7–8; Denys Sutton, *Nocturne: The Art of James McNeill Whistler* (London, 1963), p. 56.

22 Whistler to Helen Euphrosyne Whistler, [January/February 1880], GUL W681, GUV 06687.

23 Richard Goy, *Venice: The City and Its Architecture* (London, 1997), p. 149.

*of variegated stones, jasper and porphyry, and deep-green serpentine.*<sup>24</sup>

I want to focus attention on the connection Whistler made with it in 1880, being an apposite, if arrogant, comparison, and through it, perhaps, to suggest the extent to which Whistler worked with sacred models and a spiritual ideal in mind.

Whistler was certainly thinking about Venice in 1876 when he began work on *The Peacock Room* (pl. 4 and pl. 5), as he was intending to travel there to make a series of etchings of the city. He even took advance orders from patrons.<sup>25</sup> It was only the slow progress of *The Peacock Room* that prevented him from making his planned trip.<sup>26</sup> It is therefore intriguing that *The Peacock Room* should be comparable to St. Mark's in some respects.

Both were shrines to beauty. Whistler famously declared to Lord Redesdale, "I am doing the most beautiful thing that has ever been done... the most beautiful room."<sup>27</sup> Ruskin, who expressed the belief in *The Seven Lamps of Architecture* (1848) that sacred buildings should be richly decorated as a true expression of worship, described St. Mark's in *The Stones of Venice* as "a piece of perfect and unchangeable colouring."<sup>28</sup> In fact, considering Whistler's later development of an analogy between art and music and his specific use of the term "harmony" to describe his room, it is worth noting that, in 1853, Ruskin claimed that "the perception of colour... as an ear for music" was required to appreciate the beauty of St. Mark's.<sup>29</sup> Similarly, Ruskin, following Théophile Gautier's dictum in his preface to *Mademoiselle de Maupin* (1834) that "nothing is really beautiful unless it is useless," wrote of St. Mark's in 1853: "Like other beautiful things in this world, its end is to be beautiful; and in proportion to its beauty, it receives permission to be otherwise useless."<sup>30</sup> In this way he preempted Swinburne's 1868 comments on Albert Moore's *Azaleas* ("Its meaning is beauty; and its reason for being is to be"), as well as contemporary criticism of *The Peacock Room* ("No one who has ever dined in the room, or has ever seen it when closed and lit up, can say a word against the almost miraculous beauty of the decoration, which, by artificial light when the shutters which formed an integral part of the scheme were closed; was quite wonderful and entrancing,

24 E. T. Cook and Alexander Wedderburn, eds., *The Complete Works of John Ruskin*, 39 vols. (London, 1903–12), vol. 10, pp. 82–83.

25 Robert Harold Getscher, *Whistler and Venice*, Ph.D. diss., Case Western Reserve University (Ann Arbor, Michigan, University Microfilms, 1971), pp. 6–8. List in Whistler's hand, [1874/1876], GUL NB4, GUW 12714.

26 W. M. Rossetti's diary, February 9, 1877, University of British Columbia (hereafter UBC), Angeli-Dennis Collection, box 15, folder 2.

27 Pennell, *Whistler Journal*, p. 108.

28 Cook and Wedderburn, *Ruskin*, vol. 8, pp. 27–53; vol. 10, p. 97.

29 *Ibid.*, vol. 10, pp. 97–98.

30 *Ibid.*, p. 102.



FIG. 3.6 *Nocturne: Blue and Gold* — St. Mark's, Venice, 1879/80, National Museum of Wales, Cardiff, YMSM 212.

but it was complete in itself, not a background for porcelain or anything else"); and Whistler's dismissal of usefulness in the *Ten O'Clock* lecture in 1885 ("God's creations are excused by their usefulness").<sup>31</sup>

The chosen coloring of *The Peacock Room*, an iridescent blue-green and gold, finds a precedent in Venetian architecture, notably in St. Mark's. Describing the archivolt of St. Mark's, Ruskin wrote: "No green is ever used without an intermixture of blue pieces in the mosaic, nor any blue without a little centre of pale green ... so subtle was the feeling for colour."<sup>32</sup> Merrill similarly describes the complexity of Whistler's color scheme in *The Peacock Room*; although contemporaries referred to it simply as a blue and gold room, Whistler used a copper-green glaze in order to give the surface of the wainscoting, ceiling, and walls a subtle, shimmering effect.<sup>33</sup> The basic combination of blue and gold that appears in the blue walls and ceiling, and the gold wave-like patterns, gilt shelving, and golden shutters of *The Peacock Room* is Byzantine in origin, and appears throughout St. Mark's, perhaps most obviously in the blue archivolt of the central porch, covered with golden stars.

In 1880, when Whistler decided to paint a picture of St. Mark's, it was these colors, blue and gold, that dominated his canvas (fig. 3.6). Although the painting was initially exhibited as "Nocturne in Brown and Gold: St. Mark's, Venice" in the Society of British Artists' 1886/87 winter exhibition (catalogue no. 331), it

31 Algernon Charles Swinburne, "Pictures of 1868," *Essays and Studies* (London, 1875), p. 361; C. E. Williamson, *Murray Marks and His Friends* (London, 1919), pp. 94–95; Whistler, *The Gentle Art*, p. 137.

32 Cook and Wedderburn, *Ruskin*, vol. 10, p. 116.

33 Merrill, *Peacock Room*, p. 264.

was re-acquired by the artist and renamed *Nocturne: Blue and Gold — St. Mark's, Venice* and was exhibited as such in Paris at the Société Nationale des Beaux-Arts in 1892. It was in this way further aligned with *The Peacock Room*, which was entitled *Harmony in Blue and Gold*.<sup>34</sup> Although missing the detail of Ruskin's description, Whistler's version of St. Mark's also appears as a vision, its pillars and vaults shimmering against a rich blue backdrop.

Whistler's comparison of *The Peacock Room* to St. Mark's becomes even more compelling when the shared peacock motif is taken into consideration. Peacock designs could be found on the south wall of the Treasury and on the west facade of St. Mark's. A drawing of the latter was made by Ruskin and appears in volume two of *The Stones of Venice* (fig. 3.7).<sup>35</sup> There had also initially been a peacock mosaic in the north aisle, but it had been destroyed in April 1872 when the pavement was removed. In July 1872, John Bunney, one of Ruskin's copyists, gave Ruskin a box containing fragments of this mosaic, labeled, "One of the Eyes of the Peacock's tail." It is significant that peacocks formed the cover design of Ruskin's three-volume *Stones of Venice* (1851–53).<sup>36</sup> Ruskin wrote in the first volume, "the whole spirit and power of [the] peacock is in those eyes of the tail."<sup>37</sup> It was this motif that formed the basis of Whistler's *Peacock Room*, as the pamphlet he prepared for the press in February 1877 declared: "A pattern,

FIG. 3.7 John Ruskin, drawing of Byzantine sculpture of peacocks on west facade of St. Mark's; detail, from *Stones of Venice*, London, 1853, vol. 2, pl. XI.



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<sup>34</sup> YMSM, p. 123.

<sup>35</sup> Cook and Wedderburn, *Ruskin*, vol. 10, p. 166, pl. 11; Sarah Quill, *Ruskin's Venice: The Stones Revisited* (Aldershot, 2000), pp. 72–73.

<sup>36</sup> Michael Wheeler, *Ruskin's God* (Cambridge, 1999), p. 243.

<sup>37</sup> Cook and Wedderburn, *Ruskin*, vol. 9, p. 288.

invented from the Eye of the Peacock, is seen in the ceiling spreading from the lamps."<sup>38</sup> The prototypical significance of the peacock persisted for Ruskin even after the publicity surrounding Frederick Leyland's dining room linked it, in the public imagination, to Whistler, his aesthetic adversary. Indeed, for Ruskin the Byzantine beauty of St. Mark's resided in its connection with the peacock. He wrote to T. M. Rooke on December 13, 1879,

"The real fact is that all Byzantine mosaic (and all Eastern colour) has splendour for its first object — and its type is the peacock's tail."<sup>39</sup>

The peacock of course was a Christian symbol. Ruskin wrote in volume two of *The Stones of Venice*, "The peacock, used in preference to every other bird, is the well-known symbol of the resurrection."<sup>40</sup> This was due to its yearly renewal of feathers and a myth concerning the incorruptibility of its flesh. Cook and Wedderburn note that it appeared on the coins of Faustina in A.D. 138 as a symbol of the glorified soul.<sup>41</sup> It was a favorite symbol in Byzantine art, and was also used in Venice on the porch of Santa Maria del Carmine, as well as on the rood screen of the basilica of Santa Maria Assunta in Torcello. In both cases the birds are shown drinking from a font. Ruskin drew a picture of the former in volume two of *The Stones of Venice* (fig. 3.8).<sup>42</sup> He stated that when shown drinking from a fountain or font, peacocks became a symbol of "new life received in faithful baptism."<sup>43</sup>

Whistler's peacocks, however, were preening and fighting birds. It was this



FIG. 3.8 John Ruskin, drawing of Byzantine sculpture of peacocks on porch of Santa Maria del Carmine; detail, from *Stones of Venice*, London, 1853, vol. 2, pl. XI.

38 Whistler to C. A. Howell, [February 9, 1877], GUL LB 12/19/2, GUW 02847.

39 Cook and Wedderburn, *Ruskin*, vol. 30, p. lviii.

40 Ibid., vol. 10, p. 171.

41 Ibid., p. 171n.

42 Ibid., p. 166, pl. 11; Quill, *Ruskin's Venice*, pp. 72–73.

43 Cook and Wedderburn, *Ruskin*, vol. 10, p. 171.

perversion of a Christian symbol that perhaps caused the Ruskin defense at the *Whistler v. Ruskin* trial in 1878 to describe *The Peacock Room* in terms of “Devil Peacocks, being things with Devils’ heads and Peacocks’ bodies.” The Pennells believed this remark to have been a reference to Whistler’s caricature of Leyland, *The Gold Scab: Eruption in Frilthy Lucre* (1879, The Fine Arts Museums of San Francisco; YMSM 208), but in fact this painting was not executed until after the trial.<sup>44</sup> Before the trial, Ruskin’s dreams were plagued by a devil peacock with an “ugly, croaking voice.”<sup>45</sup>

It could be argued that in *The Peacock Room*, Whistler sought to create a secular temple comparable to St. Mark’s, which had been eulogized in Ruskin’s *Stones of Venice*. His extravagant use of gold leaf caused the room to gleam like an inner sanctum, and the three gilt shutters hung like a golden triptych. In addition, *La Princesse du pays de la porcelaine*, the painting in whose honor the redecoration was begun, appeared enshrined as an icon to Aestheticism, akin to Rossetti’s secularized Madonnas. This is particularly interesting considering Rossetti’s intimate connection with the painting’s history and his own paintings’ proximity in Leyland’s entrance hall and drawing room.

Rossetti possibly influenced Whistler’s working method in *La Princesse* and encouraged Whistler to design a subtler monogram for it.<sup>46</sup> He may also have designed the frame; Gustav Mayer of Obach & Co., the framemaker on Wardour Street who made Whistler’s early frames, claimed Rossetti was their designer.<sup>47</sup> In November 1866, Rossetti attempted to interest George Rae in the painting and later succeeded in selling it to Frederick Huth.<sup>48</sup> Following its exhibition at the 1872 London International Exhibition, F. R. Leyland bought the painting. Whistler was to claim later that this was due to the persuasive efforts of Rossetti, an assertion backed up by Frances Leyland.<sup>49</sup>

To return to the comparison with St. Mark’s, Ruskin considered the cathedral to function as a visual lesson to the illiterate worshipper, describing it as “a Book of Common Prayer, a vast illuminated missal, bound with alabaster instead of parchment, studded with porphyry pillars instead of jewels, and written within

44 Pennell, *Whistler Journal*, p. 326; Merrill, *Pot of Paint*, pp. 108, 354 n. 36.

45 [Dr George] H[arley], “Mr Ruskin’s Illness Described by Himself,” *British Medical Journal* (January 27, 1900), p. 225, quoted in Wheeler, *Ruskin’s God*, pp. 238–39.

46 Merrill, *Peacock Room*, p. 67; Pennell, *Life*, vol. 1, pp. 124–25.

47 Elizabeth R. Pennell’s journal, February 7, 1909, in Merrill, *Peacock Room*, p. 56.

48 D. G. Rossetti to George Rae, November 8, 1866, National Museums of Liverpool, George Rae Papers, GUW 13221; YMSM, p. 26; Merrill, *Peacock Room*, pp. 74–75.

49 Whistler to an unidentified newspaper editor, [June 1/7, 1892], GUL X24, GUW 07450; Pennell, *Whistler Journal*, p. 101.

and without in letters of enamel and gold.”<sup>50</sup> Similarly, Whistler intended *The Peacock Room* to be a lesson in beauty. William Michael Rossetti, who was invited to a private viewing of the interior on February 9, 1877, described it as “excessive in gorgeousness,” a claim not unlike that made by Ruskin about St. Mark’s as “a confusion of delight.”<sup>51</sup> Whistler’s mural of the sparring peacocks, *L’Art et L’Argent, or the Story of the Room* was, as the title declared, intended to be didactic like a sermon, ecclesiastical mural, or illumination, proclaiming its message of a sacrificial messiah to its awestruck worshippers, the maligned peacock of course representing Whistler.

Despite the existence of a full-scale cartoon of the mural (see pl. 1), Whistler attempted to circulate the myth that *The Peacock Room* had evolved without effort, suggesting divine inspiration: “Well, you know, I just painted as I went on, without design or sketch — it grew as I painted. And towards the end I reached such a point of perfection — putting in every touch with such freedom ... I forgot everything in my joy in it!”<sup>52</sup> This went against Ruskin’s belief that artists only became agents of God through hard work and perseverance,<sup>53</sup> which was of course the central idea around which the 1878 *Whistler v. Ruskin* trial focused. It was at this time that Whistler began to make a sustained use of biblical quotation within his public and private correspondence for emotive and satirical effect, notably presenting himself as an artistic Christ figure, challenging Ruskin’s rhetorical use of biblical language in his art criticism and his personal stylization along the lines of an Old Testament prophet.<sup>54</sup> Furthermore, Whistler was reacting to Ruskin’s presentation of J. M. W. Turner as an artist-prophet/messiah in volume one of *Modern Painters*.<sup>55</sup> He pointedly described his 1883 Fine Art Society catalogue *Etchings & Drypoints. Venice. Second Series* (his *Stones of Venice*) as his Bible of art.<sup>56</sup>

In the 1870s critics, too, were beginning to use religious language in their discussion of Whistler’s work. Describing *Nocturne in Blue and Silver* (ca. 1871/72, Fogg Art Museum, Harvard University, Cambridge, Mass.; YMSM 113) in his *Academy* review of the Grosvenor Gallery in May 1877, W. M. Rossetti talked of

50 Cook and Wedderburn, *Ruskin*, vol. 10, p. 112.

51 W. M. Rossetti’s diary, February 9, 1877, UBC, Angeli-Dennis Collection, folder 15, box 2; Cook and Wedderburn, *Ruskin*, vol. 10, p. 83.

52 Pennell, *Life*, vol. 1, p. 147.

53 Cook and Wedderburn, *Ruskin*, vol. 11, pp. 178–79.

54 Joanna Meacock, “‘Ladies and Gentlemen! — It is with great hesitation and much misgiving that I appear before you in the character of — The Preacher’: Whistler and Scriptural Persuasion,” *British Art Journal* 8, no. 3 (Winter 2007/8), pp. 24–30.

55 Cook and Wedderburn, *Ruskin*, vol. 3, p. 254.

56 Whistler to Edmund Hodgson Yates, [February 1883?], GUL W1116, GUW 07127.

“a sort of artistic divination.”<sup>57</sup> In his review of the gallery in the following year, he discussed Whistler’s “eccentric gospel that human beings are, for the purposes of art, not human, but merely so much opportunity for colour or tone.”<sup>58</sup> This use of a sacramental vocabulary was widespread among Whistler’s critics, and was not just used emptily to suggest a mere visual potency, but was promoted by the artist and suggested by the works of art themselves.

The society preacher Rev. Hugh Reginald Haweis “preached about the beauty of the Peacock Room” in a sermon ironically entitled “Money and Morals,” delivered on February 18, 1877, at St. James’s Hall.<sup>59</sup> In this sermon Haweis declared that “something akin to a religious awe” came over him when he entered the room, and that he felt the walls and ceiling to be “aglow with the inexhaustible richness of the one Divine idea.”<sup>60</sup> Whistler described the sermon as “a perfect poem of praise.”<sup>61</sup>

Frederick Shields declared at one of Lucy Rossetti’s “at homes” in 1877, at which Whistler was present, that “the series of pictures at the Grosvenor Gallery named The Days of Creation (really of course a series by Burne-Jones) are the several pictures done by Whistler—Creation of Light fireworks at Cremorne, Creation of man portrait of Irving as Philip 2, &c.”<sup>62</sup> Whistler, who in 1885 went on to pronounce his own creation narrative in the *Ten O’Clock* lecture, declaring that the true artist-creator “went beyond the slovenly suggestion of Nature,” bringing “forth from chaos, glorious harmony,” would have found truth in Shields’s comment, despite its obvious humor.<sup>63</sup> Indeed, Robert de Montesquiou wrote in 1885 a poem praising “the Creations of the God Whistler,” entitled “Let there be Night and let there be Light.”<sup>64</sup>

Rev. P. T. Forsyth described Rossetti’s mature works as the “art of the soul,” and Frederic Myers referred to them as “the sacred pictures of a new religion.”<sup>65</sup> I would argue that Whistler’s paintings can also be understood in this capacity. While Rossetti filled his canvases with saintly images, incense-laden atmospheres, and religious symbolism, Whistler was transforming the world around him into a new aesthetic creation,

57 W. M. Rossetti, *Academy* (May 26, 1877), p. 467; Roger Peattie, “Whistler and W. M. Rossetti: ‘Always on the Easiest & Pleasantest of Terms,’” *Journal of Pre-Raphaelite Studies* 4 (Autumn 1995), pp. 78–92 (at p. 87).

58 W. M. Rossetti, *Academy* (May 18, 1878), p. 447; Peattie, “Whistler and W. M. Rossetti,” p. 87.

59 Whistler to James Anderson Rose, November [20], 1878, GUL R128, GUW 05230.

60 Rev. H. R. Haweis, *Money and Morals: A Sermon Preached at St James’ Hall, London, February 18, 1877* (Cornhill, 1877), p. 8.

61 See note 59 above.

62 W. M. Rossetti’s diary, June 28, 1877, UBC, Angeli–Dennis Collection, box 15, folder 2.

63 Whistler, *The Gentle Art*, pp. 140, 143.

64 Comte Robert de Montesquiou-Fezensac, October 17, 1885, GUL M370, GUW 04100. It was sent to Whistler on May 10, 1887 and later published in *Le Parcours du rêve au souvenir* (Paris, 1895), p. 266.

65 P. T. Forsyth, *Religion in Recent Art* (London, 1889; 1901), p. 22; Frederic William Henry Myers, “Rossetti and the Religion of Beauty,” *Cornhill Magazine* 47 (February 1883), pp. 213–24 (at p. 219).

suggesting a new spirituality based on the beauty of color and form. For him, the artist surpassed the Christian God as creator. An anonymous writer to the *Glasgow Herald* in 1892 satirically declared, "Mr. Whistler is the apostle of the new gospel which has so stridently proclaimed that art can be viewed only from its technical side."<sup>66</sup>

According to Theodore Watts-Dunton, Rossetti came to consider Whistler "an uneducated brainless fellow" whose paintings were "flat and wanting in knowledge of technique."<sup>67</sup> In turn, the Pennells claimed that Whistler described Rossetti as "not an artist, you know, but charming, and a gentleman."<sup>68</sup> The Pennells summed up the artistic exchange between the two men as "wholly superficial and transitory."<sup>69</sup> However, Swinburne recognized the significance of their shared religious devotion to beauty and form and their use of a sacred vocabulary to express it. In 1868 he wrote: "Rossetti has in common with Whistler — the love of beauty for the very beauty's sake, the faith and trust in it as in a god indeed."<sup>70</sup>

66 "Criticus" [unknown] to editor of *Glasgow Herald*, [March 2, 1892], GUL Spier Collection, GUW 11819.

67 William Heinemann journal, April 26, 1903, in Merrill, *Peacock Room*, p. 229.

68 Pennell, *Life*, vol. 1, p. 110.

69 Ibid.

70 W. M. Rossetti and A. C. Swinburne, *Notes on the Royal Academy Exhibition* (London, 1868); S. N. Ghose, *Dante Gabriel Rossetti and Contemporary Criticism, 1849–1882* (Dijon, 1929), pp. 100–101.

# Whistler and Monet: Impressionism and Britain

*Katharine Lochnan*

In her 1995 monograph on Claude Monet, Virginia Spate wrote, “There is one omission from the book which I particularly regret — that of the role of Monet’s friends in the creation of his art. Impressionism was shaped by long-standing friendships, and to isolate Monet as I have done is to deprive his work of a vital part of its meaning.”<sup>1</sup> That same year, Charles Stuckey pointed out that “the relentless nationalistic thinking structured into art museums and writing about art has inevitably marginalized the subject of Monet’s interactions with foreign artists and collectors.” As an example, he said, “The near total absence of information about the Americans in Monet’s life leaves a big blank in our picture of the otherwise well-documented artist.”<sup>2</sup> He identified the relationship between Whistler and Monet as a major scholarly lacuna.

The 2004/5 exhibition *Turner, Whistler, Monet: Impressionist Visions*<sup>3</sup> recognized the Whistler–Monet connection as a key to understanding the history of Impressionism, particularly in Britain, but the focus on Turner’s influence on them diminished the focus on Whistler and Monet together. The fact that their relationship has been overlooked stems largely from a paucity of documentation. The only known correspondence is thirteen letters from Monet to Whistler now housed in Special Collections at the Glasgow University Library. Covering the period 1876 to 1892, these letters provide valuable insight into the two painters’ professional and personal relationship during the period when they began their close collaboration. Yet in order fully to reconstruct their relationship we are forced to turn to other categories of evidence: a chronological concordance identifying overlapping patterns and activities, and the visual evidence found in the works themselves.

Monet began to walk in Whistler’s footsteps in 1859. He was six years younger than Whistler, a generation gap at that pivotal moment when Realism was morphing into Impressionism. Whistler attended Charles Gleyre’s academy and gravitated into the circle of Gustave Courbet. After attending the Salon in May 1859, he moved to London. Monet arrived in Paris from his home in Le Havre in May 1859, in time

1 Virginia Spate, *Claude Monet: Life and Work* (New York, 1992), p. 6.

2 Charles Stuckey, *Claude Monet* (Art Institute of Chicago, 1995), p. 14.

3 Organized by the Art Gallery of Ontario Toronto in conjunction with Tate Britain and the Musée d’Orsay/Réunion des Musées Nationaux, Paris.

to see the Salon.<sup>4</sup> He also moved into the Courbet circle along with other disciples of Charles Baudelaire, and attended Gleyre's academy sporadically from 1862 to 1864. Courbet and Gleyre would have urged both Whistler and Monet to maintain their independence and seek their unique artistic voices.

London was to become Whistler's home, although he continued to identify with the French school. He kept in touch with developments in Paris through the *Société des trois*, which he formed with Henri Fantin-Latour and Alphonse Legros. While aspiring to inaugurate "the painting of the future," they sought to further one another's interests on opposite sides of the Channel.<sup>5</sup> Fantin wrote regularly with news of the Paris art world and visited Whistler in London. Whistler introduced him to Edwin Edwards, who became Fantin's patron. Making regular visits to Paris, Whistler met Edouard Manet, a rising star, in 1861. By 1862, Whistler was being called a member of the "school of Courbet" along with Manet, J. J. Tissot, and Fantin.<sup>6</sup>

Whistler's first Thames etchings, which were shown at Martinet's gallery in Paris in January 1862, attracted Baudelaire's admiration,<sup>7</sup> and Monet may have seen them there. That summer, Monet saw Manet's work at Martinet's and was bowled over. From that time on their works as well as their names were frequently confused, to Manet's irritation.<sup>8</sup> Monet could have seen Whistler's work alongside that of Courbet, Manet, and Edgar Degas at the Salon des Refusés in 1863. At the Salon of 1864, Monet would have seen Fantin's *Homage to Delacroix*, in which Whistler was given a more prominent position than either Manet or Baudelaire. And at the Salon of 1865, he would have seen Fantin's *The Toast: Homage to Truth*, in which Whistler wore a kimono, setting the stage for his own salon submission, *La Princesse du pays de la porcelaine* (see pl. 4).

In the winter of 1865, Fantin met Monet, perhaps at the home of the uncle of the artist Frédéric Bazille, who shared his studio with Monet.<sup>9</sup> That autumn Whistler painted with Courbet on the Normandy coast, followed by Monet in 1866. After the opening of the 1866 Salon, Zacharie Astruc, whose portrait Whistler had etched in 1859, introduced Monet to Manet and his circle, which included Fantin, at the café

4 Spate, *Monet*, p. 17.

5 M. Ferlet to Ludovic Barrie, January 6, 1859, Bibliothèque d'Art et d'Archéologie, Paris, quoted in Louise d'Argencourt and Douglas Druick, *The Other Nineteenth Century: Paintings and Sculptures in the Collection of Mr. and Mrs. Joseph Tanenbaum* (National Gallery of Canada, Ottawa, 1978), p. 92.

6 Ibid., p. 26.

7 Lochnan, *Etchings*, p. 138.

8 Spate, *Monet*, p. 39. This also happened when they were shown in New York in 1885.

9 See d'Argencourt and Druick, *The Other Nineteenth Century*, p. 14. Spate (*Monet*, p. 24) speculates that they could have met at the home of Commandant and Mme Lejosne where Manet, Bazille, Baudelaire, Fantin, Nadar, Champfleury, and Louis-Edmond Duranty were also received.



FIG. 4.1 Claude Monet, *Ice Floes on the Seine at Bougival*, 1867/68, Louvre, Paris, Photo: Hervé Lewandowski, Réunion des Musées Nationaux/Art Resource, NY.

Guérbois.<sup>10</sup> Located in the newly built quarter of Batignolles, it was considered the “headquarters for the debate on modern life.”<sup>11</sup> Early in 1867, Fantin wrote to express his admiration for Monet in a letter to Edwards. Manet was seen as the new Realist leader, and Fantin signaled a shift of allegiance from Courbet to Manet by painting Manet’s portrait for the Salon of 1867. Whistler, increasingly identified with the Aesthetic Movement in Britain, wrote to Fantin in summer 1867, denouncing the influence of Courbet and Realism.<sup>12</sup> Although they always remained friends, their correspondence fell off after this, and Fantin found Whistler’s new work incomprehensible. The first hints of Monet’s interest in Whistler’s work appear around 1867. In the exhibition catalogue *Turner Whistler Monet*, John House points out that Monet’s *Ice Floes on the Seine at Bougival* (fig. 4.1) appears to owe a debt to Whistler’s *Chelsea in Ice* of 1864 (private collection; YMSM 53), which Monet could have seen in Paris.<sup>13</sup> Monet may also have been familiar with Whistler’s etching *The Music Room* (fig. 4.2), which could have been a source for the composition of Monet’s paintings of 1868/69, *Dinner* (private collection) and *Luncheon* (fig. 4.3). This etching of the Haden family may have been one of the etchings Whistler gave to Fantin to take back to Paris, after he and Fantin stayed with the Hadens during Fantin’s 1859 visit. The enigmatic sentinel figure of the woman wearing black in Monet’s work also recalls the figure of Miss Boott in Whistler’s *Harmony in Green and Rose: The Music Room* (fig. 4.4), although the latter does not appear to have been exhibited in Paris by that time.

When the Franco-Prussian War broke out in July 1870, Fantin wrote to Edwards

<sup>10</sup> Spate, *Monet*, p. 18.

<sup>11</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 39.

<sup>12</sup> Whistler to Henri Fantin-Latour, [1867], PWC 1/33/27, GUW 08047.

<sup>13</sup> Lochnan, *Turner Whistler Monet*, p. 124.



FIG. 4.2 *The Music Room*, 1858, Freer Gallery of Art, Smithsonian Institution, Washington, D.C.: Gift of Charles Lang Freer; K.33.



FIG. 4.3 Claude Monet, *The Luncheon*, 1868, Städel Museum, Frankfurt am Main.



FIG. 4.4 *Harmony in Green and Rose: The Music Room*, 1858, Freer Gallery of Art, Smithsonian Institution, Washington, D.C.: Gift of Charles Lang Freer; YMSM 34.

that he might be forced to seek refuge in England. It was, however, not Fantin but Monet who did so. Fantin continued to ask Edwards if he had heard any news of Whistler, and he probably asked Monet to look him up in London. Edwards would also have been concerned to have news of Fantin. The Edwardses had always put up Fantin at their home at Sunbury on Thames, where they had entertained Whistler's friends from Paris during the 1860s, and they remained loyal to Whistler after his

falling out with Seymour Haden in 1867. Monet did meet the Edwardses: in spring 1870, Fantin wrote to Edwards describing his plans for the Batignolles painting without mentioning Monet, but when he wrote to describe the finished painting in May 1871, he made a point of saying that it contained a portrait of “Monet, the painter, whom you know personally.”<sup>14</sup> Edwards offered to purchase the painting sight unseen.

As Monet did not speak English, he would have sought out French-speaking artists in London, especially those who frequented the same artistic circle in Paris. Charles-François Daubigny was in London and ran into Monet and Camille Pissarro, both of whom he introduced to Paul Durand-Ruel. Daubigny had spent an excellent evening dining at Whistler’s home in 1866, and had Whistler’s address with him.<sup>15</sup> Pissarro spoke glowingly of Whistler’s work in a letter to his son Lucien in 1882, and as he did not return to London until 1890, had probably visited Whistler’s Chelsea studio in 1870.<sup>16</sup> The Whistler circle was sympathetic to the plight of French artists living in exile and would have welcomed them. Whistler’s mother raised a fund to assist the widow of an exiled artist who had died in London, to which D. G. Rossetti contributed.

Monet certainly appears to have been familiar with Whistler’s paintings and etchings of the Thames by the time he painted his three views in 1870/71: *The Thames below Westminster* (National Gallery, London; Wildenstein 166), *Boats in the Port of London* (private collection; Wildenstein 167), and *The Thames at London* (fig. 4.5). The smooth opacity of their surfaces, the limited palette, and the lighting and atmospheric effects recall Whistler’s Thames paintings of the 1860s, while their compositional structure suggests a familiarity with Whistler’s Thames etchings of 1859 such as *The Pool* (fig. 4.6) and *Thames Police* (fig. 4.7). That winter, after years of frustrated attempts, Whistler was finally preparing the Thames Set for publication. It was released, to great acclaim, in May 1871, the month Monet left England.

Monet also appears to have been familiar with Whistler’s *At the Piano* (fig. 4.8), which he could have seen in Paris when it was exhibited in 1859 at Bonvin’s atelier Flamand, attracting Courbet’s admiration. It was shown again at the Salon of 1867, where it was admired by Théophile Thoré, who asked Manet to forward a letter to Whistler offering to buy it. Haden, however, had already purchased it.<sup>17</sup> Although Whistler and Haden fell out that year, Haden, who continued to collect etchings,

14 “Monet, peintre, que vous connaissez.” Henri Fantin-Latour to Edwin Edwards, July 15, 1871, Bibliothèque de Grenoble.

15 This information was brought to my attention by John House, who discovered it.

16 Camille Pissarro to Lucien Pissarro, March 20, 1882, in Janine Bailly-Herzberg, ed., *Correspondence de Camille Pissarro* (Paris, 1980–81), vol. 1, letter 103.

17 William Bürger (Théophile Thoré) to Edouard Manet, [1867], GUL BP II L/52; and see note 12 above.



FIG. 4.5 Claude Monet, *The Thames at London*, 1871, National Museum of Wales, Cardiff.



FIG. 4.6 *The Pool*, 1859, Freer Gallery of Art, Smithsonian Institution, Washington, D.C.: Gift of Charles Lang Freer; K.43.



FIG. 4.7 *Thames Police*, 1859, Freer Gallery of Art, Smithsonian Institution, Washington, D.C.: Gift of Charles Lang Freer; K.44.

and whose own Thames etchings had been published and celebrated by Philippe Burty in the *Gazette des Beaux-Arts*, maintained close contacts with artists and critics from Paris. It is likely that Daubigny visited him, and he could have introduced Monet to Burty, who lived near the Hadens in South Kensington. In Monet's pensive portrait of his wife made in London, *Meditation, Madame Monet Sitting on a Sofa* (fig. 4.9), the figure of Camille wearing black and seated in profile, the elaborately carved feet of the daybed, and the truncated gold picture frames appear to refer to Whistler's "piano picture."

Eight years earlier, in 1862, Whistler had discovered Japanese prints on the Paris market and brought them to London, where he showed them to the Rossetti circle, inaugurating the craze for Japanese prints and other oriental objets d'art. It was through the study of Japanese woodcuts that Whistler found the key to what he referred to as the "decorative requirement" for painting. Monet was also a pioneer

*japoniste*, and Whistler's collection and its display in his home would have fascinated him. The setting of *Meditation* suggests a familiarity with Whistler's interior at No. 2 Lindsey Row, to which he moved in 1867, with its distempered walls, blue-and-white china, and asymmetrical "flights" of Japanese fans. Following his return to France, Monet's interior at Argenteuil reflected Whistler's: he painted his walls with distemper and pinned Japanese fans in flights across them, as can be seen in Renoir's portrait of ca. 1872, *Madame Claude Monet Reading* (fig. 4.10). Monet's domestic interior at Giverny, established some years later, also bore a close relationship to Whistler's decorative schemes.<sup>18</sup>

Whistler began applying the lessons learned from Japanese prints to the construction of his picture space in 1864. He "flattened" the picture plane, raised the horizon line, truncated the composition at the edge of the canvas, employed a limited range of color "harmonies," and incorporated Japanese motifs. After internalizing the oriental aesthetic, he began to create his more subtly *japoniste* Thames "nocturnes." These had a long gestation period and are notoriously hard to date, but the first of them were in his studio when Monet was in London. Monet may have seen *Nocturne: Blue and Silver—Chelsea* (see fig. 13.3), which was probably included among the nocturnes shown in Paris at Durand-Ruel's rue Lafitte gallery in 1873.<sup>19</sup> He would have seen how Whistler transformed the ugly industrial landscape of Battersea into a thing of beauty by portraying it cloaked in mist or shrouded in darkness. Working in part from nature and in part from memory, Whistler produced paintings that were remarkable for their subjectivity and their evocative quality.



FIG. 4.8 *At the Piano*, 1858/59, Bequest of Louise Taft Semple, Taft Museum of Art, Cincinnati, Ohio; YMSM 24.

18 Louis Vauxcelles, "Un après-midi chez Claude Monet," *L'Art et les Artistes* (December 1905), pp.85–90 (at p. 88).

19 Geneviève Lacambre, "Whistler and France," in Dormont and MacDonald, pp. 39–49 (at p. 44).



FIG. 4.9 Claude Monet, *Meditation, Madame Monet Sitting on a Sofa*, 1870, Musée d'Orsay, Paris, Photo: Hervé Lewandowski, Réunion des Musées Nationaux/Art Resource, NY.

FIG. 4.10 Pierre-Auguste Renoir, *Madame Claude Monet Reading*, ca. 1872, Sterling and Francine Clark Institute, Williamstown, Mass.



It is hard to believe that it was merely coincidental that, following his return to France in 1871, Monet settled at Argenteuil, whose suburban landscape so closely echoed that of Whistler's Chelsea. The view of the national river, a bridge engulfed in wooden scaffolding, and smoking factory chimneys provided Monet with the same compositional elements derived from modern life. He also appears to have viewed the landscape through eyes familiar with Whistler's compositions. The scaffolding around Argenteuil, *the Bridge under Repair* (fig. 4.11), for instance, recalls Whistler's painting *The Last of Old Westminster* (fig. 4.12), which was exhibited at the Société Nationale des Beaux-Arts in Paris in 1862 (after which it was sold). Whistler described the compositional concept for his *japoniste* "bridge picture," *Nocturne: Blue and Gold—Old Battersea Bridge* (fig. 4.13) in a letter to Fantin in the mid-1860s.<sup>20</sup> Its dramatic and unconventional focus on a single support recalls Hiroshige's *Kyobashi Bridge* from *One Hundred Views of Edo*, which Monet knew as well.<sup>21</sup>

Whistler first exhibited alongside Monet in three exhibitions of the Society of French Artists at Durand-Ruel's London gallery in the winter of 1872 and the summer and winter of 1873. In 1874, Degas invited both of them to exhibit in the proposed "salon of realists," nicknamed the "First Impressionist Exhibition." Like Manet, Whistler was planning a one-man exhibition and declined. Monet accepted

20 "Je travail aussi à arranger le 'Pont' — une composition très importante je crois comme résultat —" Whistler to Henri Fantin-Latour, n.d. [1867], PWC 1/33/25, GUW 08045.

21 Spate (*Monet*, p. 104) notes the influence of Hiroshige's *Thirty-Six Views of Mount Fuji*, of which Monet owned nine, and his three-volume *One Hundred Views of Mount Fuji*, which Monet also owned.



FIG. 4.11 Claude Monet, *Argenteuil, the Bridge under Repair*, 1872, Private Collection, a loan to the Fitzwilliam Museum, Cambridge.



FIG. 4.12 *The Last of Old Westminster*, 1862, Museum of Fine Arts, Boston; YMSM 39.



FIG. 4.13 *Nocturne: Blue and Gold — Old Battersea Bridge*, 1872/73, Tate Britain, London, ©2007; YMSM 140.

and sent *Impression: Sunrise* (Musée Marmottan, Paris; Wildenstein 263), made between 1872 and 1873. In this painting of the industrial port of Le Havre, memories of Turner's sunrises and Whistler's nocturnes coalesce. Not surprisingly, one critic took it for a view of the Thames. This work famously elicited accusations of "lack of finish" and was dubbed "impressionist," giving the name to the movement. The critic Castagnary pointed out that "the title *Japonais* which they were first given makes no sense. If one wants to characterize them with a word that explains them, one would have to coin the new term of *Impressionists*. They are Impressionists in the sense that they reproduce not the landscape, but the sensation evoked by the landscape. Even the word has passed into their language: in the catalogue, M. Monet's *Sunrise* is not called landscape, but



FIG. 4.14 *Battersea: Dawn*, 1875, Freer Gallery of Art, Smithsonian Institution, Washington, D.C.: Gift of Charles Lang Freer; K.155.

*impression.*"<sup>22</sup> Whistler must have known and admired Monet's painting, for his drypoint *Battersea: Dawn* (fig. 4.14) effectively translates Monet's sunrise on the Seine into a sunrise on the Thames.

Accusations of lack of finish were directed increasingly at the Impressionists, particularly at Whistler and Monet. In 1875 Durand-Ruel was forced to close his Bond Street gallery, all but ending the exhibition of Impressionist paintings in London for the next five years.<sup>23</sup> The Impressionist auction which took place at the Hôtel Drouot in Paris that year marked the beginning of eight years of chronic financial difficulties for Monet.

Monet could have seen Whistler's *La Princesse du pays de la porcelaine* of 1864/65 at the Salon of 1865 or in his studio in 1870. Monet sent the startling and provocative kimono painting *La Japonaise* (fig. 4.15) to the Salon of 1875 and the Second Impressionist Exhibition of 1876. He later referred to it as "a piece of filth," and the impecunious artist may have hoped that it would appeal to moneyed tastes. It sold quickly and for a high price.<sup>24</sup>

As attacks on Impressionism mounted, Whistler and Monet became increasingly dependent on private patrons. In August 1876 Whistler began work on his decorative scheme for Frederick Leyland's dining room (see pls. 4 and 5), and perhaps, once again, it was not sheer coincidence that in late summer Monet began work on a series of decorative panels for Ernest Hoschedé's Paris dining room.<sup>25</sup>

22 Jules-Antoine Castagnary, "L'exposition du boulevard des Capucines: Les impressionnistes," *Le Siècle* (April 29, 1874), reprinted in Hélène Adhémar and Sylvie Gache, "L'exposition de 1874 chez Nadar (rétrospective documentaire)" in *Centenaire de l'impressionisme* (Grand Palais, Paris, 1974), p. 265.

23 Kate Flint, ed., *The Impressionists in England: The Critical Reception* (London, 1984), p. 5.

24 Spate, *Monet*, p. 23.

25 *Ibid.*, p. 119.



FIG. 4.15 Claude Monet, *La Japonaise*, 1875/76, Museum of Fine Art, Boston.



FIG. 4.16 Claude Monet, *Turkeys*, 1877, Musée d'Orsay, Paris, Réunion des Musées Nationaux/Art Resource, NY.

While Whistler employed a peacock motif, Monet employed a turkey motif (fig. 4.16), both inspired by Japanese prints.

In 1876, in response to the Second Impressionist Exhibition, a French critic wrote that the Impressionists “take canvases, paint and brushes, throw on a few colours haphazardly and sign the results.”<sup>26</sup> In 1877, the critic for *L'Artiste* described the Third Impressionist Exhibition, which opened on April 5, as “an orgy of impastos.”<sup>27</sup> Three months later these words were echoed across the Channel in *Fors Clavigera* by John Ruskin, when he accused Whistler of “flinging a pot of paint in the public's face.”<sup>28</sup>

The resultant *Whistler v. Ruskin* court case was fought largely over the issue of “finish.” Edward Burne-Jones, who appeared on behalf of Ruskin, said, “In my opinion [the] complete finish should be the aim of all artists.... The danger to art of the plaintiff's lack of finish is that men who come afterward will perform mere mechanical work, without the excellencies of colour and unrivaled power of representing atmosphere which are displayed by the plaintiff, and so the art of the country

<sup>26</sup> Ibid., p. 116.

<sup>27</sup> Ibid., p. 124.

<sup>28</sup> John Ruskin, *Fors Clavigera: Letters to the Workmen and Labourers of Great Britain*, Letter 29: “Life Guards of a New Life,” in E. T. Cook and Alexander Wedderburn, eds., *The Complete Works of John Ruskin* (39 vols., London, 1903–12), vol. 29, p. 160.

will sink down to mere mechanical whitewashing.”<sup>29</sup> Albert Moore, Whistler’s chief witness, challenged Burne-Jones by pointing out that the “chief difference between the English and Continental nations is the degree of finish.”<sup>30</sup> After Burne-Jones lost the case for Ruskin he fantasized “fighting a duel” with Whistler “on the sands of Calais” to ensure that Impressionism stayed on the other side of the Channel.<sup>31</sup>

Whistler’s debts, which largely resulted from living beyond his means, piled up during the summer of 1877. Leyland refused to pay what Whistler asked for the decoration of his dining room, and Ruskin’s attack undermined the market for his paintings. After the cost of the court case in November 1878 was added to Whistler’s debt load, he was forced into bankruptcy. In January 1879 bailiffs occupied the “White House” in Tite Street, Chelsea.

On the other side of the Channel, Monet had also been living beyond his means, and was having financial problems. The dining-room commission for Hoschedé was never finished and Hoschedé, too, was forced to declare bankruptcy. Like Whistler, Monet was soon in the clutches of bailiffs. In January 1878, the family were forced to leave their home at Argenteuil and moved in with the Hoschedé family at Vétheuil. After Hoschedé abandoned his family, and Monet’s wife died, Alice Hoschedé became Monet’s mistress. At Vétheuil he continued to paint the Seine and experiment with atmospheric effects, just as Whistler did in his nocturnes.

On September 9, 1879 Whistler was commissioned by the Fine Art Society to go to Venice to make a series of etchings. On his way, he stopped off in Paris for two days and saw friends, among them Manet. They must have discussed the court case and its implications. It is possible that Whistler told his friends that he would no longer be painting Thames nocturnes, for it was during the following year that Monet first announced his intention to return to London to paint the Thames.<sup>32</sup> Given Whistler’s possessive nature, it is highly unlikely that their friendship would have blossomed if Monet had “stolen” Whistler’s subject without his permission.

Whistler painted several nocturnes in Venice, among them *Nocturne: Blue and Gold — St Mark’s, Venice* (see fig. 3.6). He revisited this theme in etching in *Nocturne* (fig. 4.17), and by manipulating ink over the same etched matrix, varied the light, time of day, temperature, and atmospheric effects. Thus, in place of a static image he created an edition of unique proofs with an almost cinematic quality. His Venice etchings were impressionist masterpieces, but when they were shown in London in

29 Merrill, *Pot of Paint*, p. 175.

30 Ibid., p. 227.

31 Edward Burne-Jones to Joan Severn [November 27, 1878], quoted in Merrill, *Pot of Paint*, p. 108.

32 Claude Monet to Théodore Duret, August 13, 1887, Wildenstein, vol. 3, letter 794.



FIG. 4.17 *Nocturne*, 1879/80, Freer Gallery of Art, Smithsonian Institution, Washington, D.C.: Gift of Charles Lang Freer; K.184.

November 1880, they were seen as “unfinished” and called by one critic “another crop of Mr. Whistler’s little jokes.”<sup>33</sup>

The court case and its aftermath brought Whistler’s most brilliant and controversial period as an artist to an abrupt end, but in the verdict he found the mission which would play a central role during the second half of his career. As the leading protagonist for French Impressionism in Britain, he would now do everything possible to ensure that Ruskin and Burne-Jones’s worst nightmare would come to pass. He would see to it that young British artists and the British public were exposed to French Impressionism.

The Impressionists followed Whistler’s battle with concern and sympathy from the other side of the Channel. His court case had serious implications, as they were keen to break into the lucrative London art market. In 1882 the Impressionists pleaded unsuccessfully for an exhibition at the Grosvenor Gallery. Camille Pissarro wrote to Lucien Pissarro in 1882 saying Ruskin’s criticism “is serious, very serious, for this American artist is a great artist, and the only one that America can truly glorify with this title.”<sup>34</sup> He advised his son to study Whistler’s etchings, saying, “The suppleness you find in them, the pithiness and delicacy which charm you derive from the inking which is done by Whistler himself.”<sup>35</sup>

Whistler finally had an opportunity to make use of what he had learned at West Point. He planned his assault on the British art establishment with the precision of a military campaign. The young artists who flocked to him in the wake of the court case and became his “followers” were conscripted as “foot-soldiers” in the war. The conflict

33 Lochnan, *Etchings*, p. 216. See also Robert H. Getscher, “Whistler and Venice”, Ph.D. diss., Case Western Reserve University, 1970, pp. 216–18.

34 “ce qui est grave, très grave, car cet artiste Américain est un grand artiste, et le seul dont l’Amérique puisse se glorifier à juste titre.” Camille Pissarro to Lucien Pissarro, March 20, 1882, Bailly-Herzberg, vol.1, letter 103.

35 “la souplesse que tu constates, le moelleux, le flou qui te charme est une espèce d’estompage fait par l’imprimeur, qui est Whistler lui-même.” Camille Pissarro to Lucien Pissarro, February 28, 1883, Bailly-Herzberg, vol. 1, letter 120.

was highly visible and the battles multi-faceted: Whistler wrote pamphlets and “letters to the editor” in a mock-heroic style that lampooned Ruskin’s, and he assumed leading roles in alternative art societies which he used to promote Impressionism.

As a senior member of the New English Art Club, Whistler encouraged the young members who “devoted themselves to the discovery of the ‘painter’s poetry’ in the life about them” and demonstrated their enthusiasm for Monet by “making innumerable studies of rapid effects.”<sup>36</sup> In 1883, he dispatched his most talented pupil, Walter Sickert, to Paris to study under Manet, but when he discovered that Manet was dying, Sickert worked with Degas instead. Sickert also met and painted with Monet and other Impressionists.

As Impressionism became increasingly accepted in Britain, Whistler must have taken enormous pleasure in the embattled position of Ruskin and Burne-Jones. By 1884 Ruskin had raised the alarm, saying that British schools were in danger of losing their national character in their attempts to respond to foreign influences.<sup>37</sup> Georgiana Burne-Jones wrote of her husband that as “the ‘Impressionist’ school gained ground it was one of the most disheartening thoughts of his life.”<sup>38</sup>

In 1885 Whistler delivered his *Ten O’Clock* lecture. This was both an apologia and an attempt to reestablish his credibility. He maintained that the artist should “seek and find the beautiful in all conditions and in all times,” pointing out that while “Nature contains the elements, in colour and form, of all pictures, as the keyboard contains the notes of all music.... The artist is born to pick, and choose, and group with science, these elements, that the result may be beautiful.” It was subtly laced with thinly veiled references to those who had been most influential in forming his aesthetic. The most memorable passage, which begins, “And when the evening mist clothes the riverside with poetry, as with a veil,” paraphrased a verse in Baudelaire’s 1859 poem “Le Crépuscule du Soir,” which the poet rewrote in prose and published in 1863 in his essay “The Painter of Modern Life,” the central text of the budding Impressionists.<sup>39</sup> Whistler’s *Ten O’Clock* was, in turn, to become a seminal text for the younger generation of French symbolists. Indeed, after Monet brought Whistler and the French poet Stéphane Mallarmé together over lunch in 1888, Mallarmé published a French translation of the lecture, which contributed to Whistler’s influence in France.<sup>40</sup>

36 Alfred Thornton, *The Diary of an Art Student in the Nineties* (London, 1938), pp. 8–9, quoted in Douglas Cooper, *The Courtauld Collection* (London, 1954), p. 34.

37 Noted in Ernest Chesnau, “The English School in Peril, a letter from Paris,” *Magazine of Art* (1888), pp. 25–28, cited in Kenneth McConkey, *Impressionism in Britain* (London, 1995), pp. 31–32 n. 8.

38 Georgiana Burne-Jones, *Memorials of Edward Burne-Jones* (London, 1904), vol. 2, pp. 187–88.

39 Whistler, *The Gentle Art*, pp. 143 and 144.

40 Lochnan, *Turner, Whistler, Monet*, p. 32 and Luce Abélès, “Mallarmé, Whistler and Monet,” in Lochnan, *Turner, Whistler, Monet*, pp. 163–68.

In the mid-1880s, Whistler, who had hitherto been fiercely independent, set out to link his name with that of Monet. In March 1887, Monet, as a jury member of the Exposition Internationale Annuelle de Peintre et Sculpture (Annual International Exhibition of Painting and Sculpture), proposed that Whistler be invited to exhibit fifty oils, watercolors, and pastels at the exhibition that summer. He reported to Théodore Duret that the proposal was enthusiastically received.<sup>41</sup> The exhibition took place in May and June at the Galerie Georges Petit.

The previous year, in 1886, Whistler had become president of the Society of British Artists (SBA). The formerly moribund organization soon began to rival the Grosvenor Gallery, and the spring exhibition of 1887, which included a number of British “impressionists,” received excellent reviews. Monet visited Whistler in London in late May, and stayed with him for about two weeks. In August he wrote to Duret to say that he was “thrilled by London and also by Whistler who is a great artist.”<sup>42</sup> Whistler had invited Monet to submit works to the winter exhibition of the SBA; Monet agreed, but confided in Duret, “I hope the committee will not be too frightened by my painting. As for me, I anxiously await their response.”<sup>43</sup>

In October, while confirming in writing his willingness to exhibit in London, especially in Whistler’s company, Monet was clearly aware of the delicacy of the situation. He asked Whistler: “Do I have the right to show with you since your society only includes British artists, and are you not afraid that by showing me you will cause problems for yourself?”<sup>44</sup> His works were hung under the sobriquet of “honorable member,” and Monet came to London in late November to see the exhibition. This exposure provided him with much higher visibility in London than he had had to date, and contributed to the dramatic reversal of his fortunes. Hailing him as “the acknowledged chief” of the French Impressionist school, the *Magazine of Art* wrote, “For strength and brilliancy of general tone, and for mere decorative effect, [his paintings] have few, if any, rivals.”<sup>45</sup>

Whistler had, of course, deliberately set the cat among the pigeons. The glowing reviews, the space assigned to Monet’s paintings, and Whistler’s proposal to put

41 Claude Monet to Théodore Duret, [ca. March 13–20] 1887, Walters Art Gallery Library, Baltimore, Maryland.

42 “émervéillé de Londres et aussi de Whistler qui est un grand artiste.” Claude Monet to Théodore Duret, August 13, 1887, Wildenstein, vol. 3, letter 794.

43 “J’espère que le comité ne sera pas trop effrayé de ma peinture. Quant à moi, il me tarde de savoir l’effet produit.” Ibid.

44 “Ai-je bien le droit d’exposer avec vous puisque votre société n’est composée que d’artistes Britanniques, et ne craignez-vous pas qu’en me présentant vous n’allez pas vous attirer bien des ennuis?” Claude Monet to Whistler, October 25, 1887, Wildenstein, vol. 3, (796<sup>b</sup>) 2727, GUW 04087.

45 Royal Society of British Artists Archive, V&A Museum Archives, Box 42, Catalogues 1886–9, Clippings 1887–8: “Current Art: The Royal Society of British Artists,” *Magazine of Art*, p. 110.

Monet up for full membership contributed to the uproar which led to Whistler's resignation from the presidency of the SBA on June 4, 1888.<sup>46</sup> A contemporary jingle, "The Sufferings of Suffolk Street," tells the tale:

*But no sooner was he seated in the Presidential chair  
Than he changed our exultation into wailings of despair  
For he broke up our traditions and went in for foreign schools  
Turning out the work we're noted for, and making us look fools.*<sup>47</sup>

During Monet's November visit to Whistler they looked at the works in the latter's studio and began to plan a joint exhibition at Durand-Ruel's in Paris the following year, which Monet predicted would be "superbe."<sup>48</sup> However, Monet withdrew after falling out with Durand-Ruel and wrote to Whistler saying that although he would not be exhibiting with him this time, he would like to exhibit with him in London the following season.<sup>49</sup> Monet was always disappointed when their attempts to get together in Paris or London were frustrated. He wrote to Whistler on one of these occasions saying, "That's too bad because you know what pleasure it gives me to see you."<sup>50</sup>

Monet was well aware of the importance of Whistler's *Ten O'Clock*. Realizing that Whistler's ideas were compatible with those of Stéphane Mallarmé, Monet introduced them. When Mallarmé offered to translate the *Ten O'Clock* into French he wrote to Whistler saying, "I sympathize completely with your vision of Art" and would be "very happy to put my name below yours."<sup>51</sup> Luce Abélès believes that Whistler's friendship helped to fill the void left in Mallarmé's life following the death of Manet in 1883.<sup>52</sup> Meanwhile, the translation spread Whistler's message through the French-speaking world and linked his name with that of the leading French Symbolist.

The close personal and professional friendship that developed between Whistler, Monet, and Mallarmé recalls the *Société des trois*. They shared ideas, promoted one another's interests on opposite sides of the Channel, and celebrated one another's successes. Monet and Mallarmé assisted in securing for Whistler in France the official recognition which had eluded him in England. After he was awarded the order of the Légion d'honneur,

46 Whistler had asked Mr. W. Baptiste Scoones to second his nomination of Monet, describing him as "the distinguished 'Impressionist' — very greatly to the fore in Paris — and a capital fellow here." Whistler to W. Baptiste Scoones [July 1888?], Huntington Library, San Marino, California, GUW 09417.

47 December 8, 1886, PWC, Bound Volumes of Printed Material, 35.

48 Claude Monet to Whistler, August/October 1, 1887, GUL M356, Wildenstein, vol. 3, letter 798, GUW 04086.

49 Claude Monet to Whistler, May 15, 1888, GUL M360, Wildenstein, vol. 3, letter 888, GUW 04090.

50 "C'est mal car vous savez le plaisir que j'ai à vous voir." Claude Monet to Whistler, November 30, 1888, GUL M361, Wildenstein, vol. 3, letter 907, GUW 04091.

51 "Je sympathisais tout avec votre vision de l'Art" and am "très heureux de mettre mon nom au dessous du vôtre." Carl P. Barbier, *Correspondence Mallarmé-Whistler* (Paris, 1964), p. 23.

52 Abélès, "Mallarmé, Whistler and Monet," p. 163.

Monet wrote, "Bravo, you have finally received a well-deserved award. I congratulate you sincerely and with all my heart," and Mallarmé urged Whistler to move to Paris.<sup>53</sup>

After Mallarmé and Duret had persuaded the French state to purchase Whistler's *Arrangement in Grey and Black: Portrait of the Painter's Mother* (see fig. 6.3) for the Musée du Luxembourg in November 1891, Whistler was promoted to Officier of the Légion d'honneur. In December 1891, Monet made a quick trip to London to see his paintings, which were being exhibited at the New English Art Club, and to attend Whistler's victory celebration at the Chelsea Arts Club. Whistler made a point of introducing him to young Chelsea artists who expressed a great deal of interest in his work.<sup>54</sup> Monet only regretted that his English wasn't better.

Official recognition for Whistler in France helped raise his credibility in England, and the retrospective exhibition *Nocturnes, Marines, and Chevalet Pieces*, which opened at the Goupil Gallery in London in March 1892, was a huge critical success. Whistler's mission was accomplished: he had defeated the philistines and won public recognition. Whistler and his wife, Beatrix, moved to Paris the following month, and Whistler wrote to a friend saying: "I have really earned my Paris! — I mean that if I had come away before absolutely completing my long fight of many weary years over there, I should not feel that I had a right to the peace and recognition that awaited me here."<sup>55</sup> The following year, in 1893, the British press observed that Impressionist ideas "permeated, where they did not overwhelm, the painting of the younger generation."<sup>56</sup>

In 1889 Monet began to paint in series, seeking to capture the moment by painting the same subject under different atmospheric conditions. This concept may owe something to Whistler's Venice nocturne etchings. Monet's *Mornings on the Seine near Giverny* (pl. 6 and pl. 7) may be a reply to Whistler's nocturnes on the Thames (fig. 4.18).<sup>57</sup> The subjective approach, poetic quality, and evocative mood which characterized Whistler's nocturnes is reflected in Monet's concept of "sensation." Further analogies can be sensed between the subtle, layered imagery found in Mallarmé's poetry and the works of Whistler and Monet. Focusing on the ephemeral aspects of nature, their subjects encapsulate both universal and personal metaphors. At the most fundamental level, the river symbolizes life. The Thames is the national river of Britain and artery of the body politic. Whistler and his

53 "Bravo, voilà enfin une récompense bien donnée. Je vous en félicite bien sincèrement et de tout Coeur." Claude Monet to Whistler, December 1, 1889, GUL M364, Wildenstein, vol. 3, letter 1019, GUW 04094; and Barbier, *Correspondence*, p. 44.

54 Claude Monet to Whistler, January 3, 1892, GUL M368, GUW 04098.

55 Whistler to [?] Morris, [December 1892?], GUL M458, GUW 04188.

56 *Daily Telegraph*, (February 18, 1893, p. 9) quoted in Flint, *Impressionists in England*, p. 11.

57 Spate, *Monet*, p. 235.



FIG. 4.18  
*Nocturne in  
 Grey and Silver*,  
 ca. 1873–75,  
 Philadelphia Museum  
 of Art: John G.  
 Johnson Collection,  
 1917; YMSM 156.

contemporaries knew that the water and air of London were horribly polluted, however, and his canvases may have inspired meditation on the relationship of man to nature, and the dialogue between vision and reality. Darkness is associated with death, and Whistler's nocturnes may, in fact, be read as requiems for a "fallen" landscape, and commentaries on the health of the nation. On a personal level, this was the modern urban landscape where Whistler lived. The Seine is the national river of France, and Monet's views show its pristine rural reaches. Mornings are associated with hope and new beginnings. On a personal level, Giverny was Monet's utopia, and this was one of his "loved landscapes." In Monet's paintings, man and nature appear to be in perfect harmony.

In 1896 Whistler took the ailing Beatrix to London, where they stayed in a sixth-floor corner room in the Savoy Hotel.<sup>58</sup> He made a series of lithographs of the view out of the window which, together, constitute a panoramic sweep from St. Paul's Cathedral to the Houses of Parliament. On May 18, a week after Beatrix died, Monet wrote a letter to Whistler that reveals the closeness of their friendship: "May the tribute of an old friend be at least a feeble source of consolation for you.... You know beyond the admiration I bear for you, how much I love you." It was signed, "With all my heart, Monet."<sup>59</sup>

In an attempt to bury the pain, Whistler resumed the fight against "the Enemy." In 1898 he became president of the International Society of Sculptors, Painters and Gravers, which showed the best international contemporary art. By comparison with the New English Art Club, which he called "only a raft," the International was

<sup>58</sup> C, vol. 1, p. 105.

<sup>59</sup> "Puisse le témoignage d'un vieil ami être pour vous une faible consolation. . . . Vous savez qu'en dehors de l'admiration que j'ai pour vous, combien je vous aime," and "à vous de tout Coeur, Monet." Claude Monet to Whistler, May 18, 1896, GUL M369, Wildenstein, vol. 3, letter 1349, GUW 04099.



FIG. 4.19 *Charing Cross Railway Bridge*, 1896, Freer Gallery of Art, Smithsonian Institution, Washington, D.C.: Gift of Charles Lang Freer; C.157.



FIG. 4.20 *Evening, Little Waterloo Bridge*, 1896, Freer Gallery of Art, Smithsonian Institution, Washington, D.C.: Gift of Charles Lang Freer; C.155.

“a fighting ship of which he as captain had taken command.”<sup>60</sup> Not surprisingly, he included works by Monet and the Impressionists in the first exhibition.

In 1899 Monet finally came to London to paint the Thames, returning in 1900. Like Whistler, he took a sixth-floor room in the Savoy Hotel overlooking the river. He walked to Chelsea and no doubt spent time with Whistler on his second campaign when Whistler was in London. Robin Spencer has “some evidence to suggest that Whistler may have been involved in Monet’s project by keeping him informed of changes in the weather.”<sup>61</sup>

Monet took up themes initiated in lithography by Whistler including Charing Cross Bridge (fig. 4.19 and pl. 8) and Waterloo Bridge (fig. 4.20 and pl. 9), which he painted at different times of day and under different atmospheric and lighting conditions. Monet loved the London fog, which combined with coal dust to create dense and toxic smog that resulted in nocturnal effects at midday. Monet’s depictions recall Whistler’s nocturnes.

<sup>60</sup> Pennell, *Life*, vol. 2, p. 223.

<sup>61</sup> Robin Spencer cites E. R. Pennell, “Journal” (unpublished), November 1, 1920, PWC, in “The Aesthetics of Change: London as Seen by James McNeill Whistler,” in *The Image of London: Views by Travellers and Emigrés* (London, 1987), pp. 49–72 (at p. 69).



FIG. 4.21 *The Balcony*, 1879/80, Freer Gallery of Art, Smithsonian Institution, Washington, D.C.: Gift of Charles Lang Freer; K.207.



FIG. 4.22 *Bridge, Amsterdam*, 1889, Freer Gallery of Art, Smithsonian Institution, Washington, D.C.: Gift of Charles Lang Freer; K.409.



FIG. 4.23 Claude Monet, *The Japanese Footbridge and the Waterlily Pool, Giverny*, 1899, Philadelphia Museum of Art: Mr. and Mrs. Carroll S. Tyson Jr. Collection, 1963.

As these images of rapidly changing atmospheric effects proved impossible to complete on the spot, Monet finished the London paintings at Giverny, working from memory. He was still at work on them when Whistler died on July 17, 1903. Monet's London series can be seen as a tribute to their artistic liaison. Although he was unable to arrange a London showing, the paintings were exhibited in Paris to great acclaim the following year.

In 1908 Monet went to Venice for the first time. Fearing that he was going blind and would soon have to stop work, he made, once again, variations on Whistler's themes, including the frontal close-up view of a palace facade in Whistler's *The Balcony* (fig. 4.21), referred to in *Palazzo Contarini* (pl. 10). Even Monet's last great series, *Waterlilies*, appears to owe a debt to his old friend. Both of them would have known Hokusai's *Mannenbashi Bridge at Fukagawa*, which influenced Whistler's *Bridge, Amsterdam* (fig. 4.22). Monet's *The Japanese Footbridge and the Waterlily Pool, Giverny* (fig. 4.23) and related works echo Hokusai and also pick up the ethereal mirrored reflections found in Whistler's etching. These waterlilies became Monet's greatest preoccupation until he died in 1926.

# Whistler as Model: The Enacted Biographies of Pictorialist Photographers

*Lilly Koltun*

In the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, photographers around the world created an ambitious new movement, called pictorialism, to claim photography as a fine art. Whistler's influence on the pictorialists has been recognized by previous scholars, who have noted that the group "affiliated themselves with Whistler's style and theory with an openness that was at once naïve and, in its blatancy, had the function and the force of a modernist manifesto."<sup>1</sup> Apart from style and theory, these ambitious artist-photographers also took on a new template of public behavior for which they were equally indebted to Whistler. The multiple biographical similarities which they shared with Whistler highlight this unexpected aspect of his influence. The model of Whistler's life would help pictorialists reject the earlier biographical construct favoured by "artistic" Victorian photographers, to conform instead to a new mode of behavior that allied them with the life histories as much as the products and beliefs of other admired contemporary artists, further reinforcing their own artistic credentials.

Pictorialists took many of their subjects from Whistlerian models: Their sitters were typically from an intimate and often anonymous circle of friends and family; Their landscapes were from an equally narrow range, often depicting the atmosphere and times of day favored by Whistler — dusk, night, fog. Similarly, pictorialists adapted stylistic techniques and surface qualities from Whistler (fig. 5.1). Paul Strand, a prominent American photographer, said that during his pictorial period he "Whistlered with a soft-focus lens."<sup>2</sup> Strand's remark reminds us that the radical lack of finish of which Whistler was accused, and on which his famous law suit with John Ruskin turned, finds a parallel in the equally radical lack of focus for which the pictorialists were roundly criticized. Sadakichi Hartmann, the great apologist for pictorialism, published a biography of Whistler in 1910 in which he linked what he considered the impressionism of both Whistler and the pictorialists by attributing the origin of impressionism to photography: "The impressionist

1 Nicolai Cikovsky Jr., with Charles Brock, "Whistler and America," in Dormant and MacDonald, pp. 29–38 (at p. 38).

2 Paul Strand, "The Art Motive in Photography" (1923), reprinted in Vicki Goldberg, ed., *Photography in Print: Writings from 1816 to the Present* (Albuquerque, N. Mex., 1981), pp. 276–87 (at p. 281).

painters...depict life in scraps and pigments, as it appears haphazard in the finder or on the ground glass of the camera.... the lens of the camera taught the painter... that all subjects cannot be seen with equal clearness, and that it is necessary to concentrate the point of interest according to the visual abilities of the eye.”<sup>3</sup>

Despite this characterization of the lens as teacher, pictorialists disparaged technological determinism

in any medium, saying it was the artistic effect that should count, not the means. They were attempting to position photography, generally regarded as a mechanical reproductive medium, as fine art. In this they recalled Whistler’s involvement with the etching revival, which also argued for the artistic elevation of a reproductive method. The pictorialists echoed Whistler’s belief that art was found in image effects, not in grand scale or plate marks. They attempted to diminish the mechanical nature of photography by employing hand-manipulated effects, including such difficult and unusual techniques as the “photo-acquatint,” a gum print process developed about 1894 by Alfred Maskell and R. Demachy, or the “glycerine-platinum” technique, developed by Joseph T. Keiley and Alfred Stieglitz in 1898. Whistler likewise was known for his demanding perfectionism and for his experiments in both reproduction and painting techniques, from etching, lithotint, and lithography on thin paper, to oil paints diluted to a watercolor consistency. This gave tonal, not impasto, effects, which were easily assimilated to matte photographic tones and surfaces.

The timing of the international vindication of Whistler’s reputation was shared by the birth and development of pictorialism. Whistler’s widely known ideas concerning art, expressed in numerous “letters to the editor,” articles, and pamphlets, were ultimately consolidated in the *Ten O’Clock* lecture of 1885 and *The Gentle Art of Making Enemies* of 1890, the very years when the pictorialist movement was

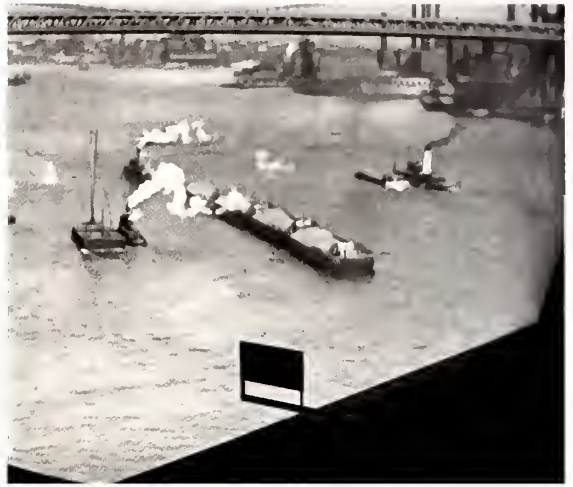


FIG. 5.1 Paul Strand, *Overlooking Harbor, New York*, 1916, platinum print, Center for Creative Photography, Tuscon; ©Aperture Foundation Inc., Paul Strand Archives.

3 Sadakichi Hartmann, *The Whistler Book* (Boston, 1910), pp. 163–64.

being initiated. By the 1880s, and particularly between 1888 and 1891, Whistler was achieving major international recognition, with shows, honors, and collectors. His portrait of Thomas Carlyle was bought by the City of Glasgow (see fig. 10.2); and the portrait of his mother, *Arrangement in Grey and Black* (see fig. 6.3), was bought for the Musée du Luxembourg in Paris. From 1892, his reputation as a modern master was unassailable. These were also critical years for the birth of pictorialist photography. By 1889, the concept of artistic photography had found expression in the publication of *Naturalistic Photography for Students of the Art* by Peter Henry Emerson, who was an admirer of Whistler's. One of its early manifestations as a style distinct from that of most professionals is found in the album of portraits by Ralph Winwood Robinson of Redhill, son of Victorian art photographer H. P. Robinson, called *Members and Associates of the Royal Academy of Arts, 1891, Photographed in Their Studios*. By 1892, the British Linked Ring had been founded (see p. 76 below), launching pictorialism on a new, more public phase.

Famously, Whistler wrote that art should aspire to the condition of music — that is, not be narrative or moral but rather should stand alone, without external references. “Nature,” Whistler declared, in what may be his best-known statement, “contains the elements, in colour and form, of all pictures, as the keyboard contains the notes of all music. But the artist is born to pick, and choose, and group with science, these elements, that the result may be beautiful — as the musician gathers his notes, and forms his chords, until he bring forth from chaos glorious harmony.”<sup>4</sup> Similarly, the Canadian pictorialist photographer Harold Mortimer-Lamb wrote: “The subject as subject is of quite secondary importance to the artist.... For nature is the instrument on which the artist plays, and the greatest art is that which most truly and melodiously strikes those chords whose vibrations are heart beats and whose music is the language of the soul.”<sup>5</sup> This musical metaphor, beloved of Whistler and the pictorialists, linked them to the aesthetic sensibility of Symbolist art, which sought a higher truth than realism to express the unity of the universe and the “music of the spheres.” Such dematerializing concepts had entered the popular consciousness, resonating with the longstanding Victorian belief in art as an expression of spiritual values and beauty. Of late nineteenth-century American art Sarah Burns writes that “the press incessantly extolled Inness, Whistler and modern tonalists, such as Dwight Tryon, for shunning the gross materialism of the physical world to reveal higher poetic truth.”<sup>6</sup>

4 Whistler, *The Gentle Art*, pp. 142–43.

5 H. Mortimer-Lamb, “Photography as a Means of Artistic Expression,” *The Canadian Magazine* 39 (May 1912), pp. 35–46.

6 Burns, p. 131.

As important as similarities of subject, style, and theoretical underpinnings between Whistler and the pictorialists is the image of the artist's life in the *Ten O'Clock* lecture. There, in his description of the first artist, Whistler provided the germ of a persona as interesting for its prescriptive as its descriptive force:

*In the beginning, [rather than hunting and fighting, this man] ... stayed by the tents with the women, and traced strange devices with a burnt stick upon a gourd.... this dreamer apart, was the first artist.... And time ... brought more capacity for luxury ... whereupon the artist, with his artificers, built palaces, and filled them with furniture, beautiful in proportion and lovely to look upon.... And the people questioned not, and had nothing to say in the matter.... And centuries passed ... until there arose a new class, who discovered the cheap, and ... the sham.... And Birmingham and Manchester arose in their might — and Art was relegated to the curiosity shop.<sup>7</sup>*

Thus, for Whistler, his hypothetical first artist operated outside the norms of society, independent of the masses yet authoritative in defining their visual art and, more specifically, all great art. Whistler also set out the doctrine of the essentiality of art, independent of any contingencies: "The master stands in no relation to the moment at which he occurs — a monument of isolation — hinting at sadness...."<sup>8</sup> This is the developing image of the avant-garde artist, an image that Whistler personified, but whose roots go back at least to the early Romantic period of the late eighteenth century. From about 1830, Eugène Delacroix and other artists in France established the idea that avant-garde art carried social and political as well as aesthetic revolutionary content.<sup>9</sup> By the late nineteenth century, avant-garde artists identified themselves as outsiders, alienated from accepted academic artistic norms, and possibly also from accepted social norms. Donald Kuspit's definition of the avant-garde artist, "an individualist and risk taker in a sheepish society ... affording ... a new vision of what art as well as life can be" is notable for claiming that the artist makes life itself seem "new and fresh where it was once old and stale."<sup>10</sup> Sarah Burns notes the view that artists often "figured themselves as a spiritual elite, marking the course of salvation from soulless luxury to high ideals."<sup>11</sup> Whistler assiduously cultivated a public image as an eccentric, temperamental, misunderstood genius of unique talent and insight. The image grew out of his unconventional life as much as his art, and it admittedly fed his marketability as a form of advertisement, but was also a self-created burden, as it contributed to his feelings of isolation.

7 Whistler, *The Gentle Art*, pp. 139–42.

8 Ibid., pp. 154–55.

9 Linda Nochlin, *The Politics of Vision: Essays on Nineteenth-Century Art and Society* (New York, 1989).

10 Donald Kuspit, *The Cult of the Avant-Garde Artist* (Cambridge, Mass., 1993), pp. 1–2.

11 Burns, p. 65.

Unlike painting, photography had no tradition against which to rebel. It had been invented in the 1830s and thus had no grand heritage that had grown old and stale. On the contrary, as a startling new medium, it was in urgent need of integration into history and tradition in order to be accepted as art. Hence, Victorian photographers before the pictorialists sought not to stress their originality but to develop an “artistic” style linked to the conventional narrative art of the academic salons, variously repeating the tropes of the picturesque, the sublime, the historical and religious, the anecdotal and the heroic, frequently expressed through a minutely finished surface.

Thus, at the very beginning of photography came also the beginning of the photographer’s imitation of art, which was to include the ideals and the persona of the artist. The notion that it is possible to identify a template for the artist’s life, a “biography” which those who call themselves artists “enact,” was published by Ernst Kris and Otto Kurz in 1934.<sup>12</sup> They identified certain repeating motifs, anecdotes, or themes — called *topoi* — which together formed the paradigm of the “great artist” over different centuries and cultures. Among these were, for example, the topos of the precocious child artist whose talent is accidentally discovered by some passing important personage; or that of the artist who simulates reality to such a degree that his work deceives astonished onlookers or seems alive. These repeating stories, Kris and Kurz claimed, served less to document actual life incidents than to argue for and validate the social position of an artist as a pre-eminent creator, comparable to a magician, a hero, or even a god. They described their concept this way:

*Biographies record typical events, on the one hand, and thereby shape the typical fate of a particular professional class, on the other hand. The practitioner of the vocation to some extent submits to this typical fate or destiny. This effect relates by no means exclusively, or indeed primarily, to the conscious thought and behavior of the individual — in whom it may take the form of a particular “code of professional ethics” — but rather to the unconscious. The area of psychology to which we point may be circumscribed by the label of “enacted biography.”*<sup>13</sup>

Carl Goldstein reasserted the continuing relevance of the theories of Kris and Kurz in 1993.<sup>14</sup> He concluded that the *topoi*, or repeating anecdotes or themes, persisted in modified form as indicators of character “into the modern world,” not because they reflected some unconscious psychological myth-making, as Kris and

12 Ernst Kris and Otto Kurz, *Legend, Myth, and Magic in the Image of the Artist* (1934; reprint, New Haven, Conn., 1979).

13 *Ibid.*, p. 132.

14 Carl Goldstein, “The image of the artist reviewed,” *Word and Image: A Journal of Verbal/Visual Enquiry* 9 (January–March 1993), pp. 9–18.

Kurz suggested, but because they corresponded to well-established rhetorical constructs for communicating moral knowledge, ultimately for arguing "the sacredness of an almost saintly role for the artist in western culture."<sup>15</sup>

A case could certainly be made that the tendency Kris and Kurz uncovered, and that Goldstein elaborated, can be seen working throughout the nineteenth and twentieth centuries to establish a typical biographical template for photographers as much as for artists. From such a perspective, it seems neither surprising nor coincidental to find a large number of parallels in the life histories of various Victorian photographers, as the artistic persona of the "great photographer" was first being validated. These go well beyond the similarities that the practice of the profession might of itself engender, moving into issues of personal character, values, and ideals, life incidents and public presentation.

Typically, for example, such a photographer's talent was easily recognized by a desirable clientele, rapidly making his studio a financial and artistic success that ultimately employed many other operators and artists. According to biographies of men such as Mathew Brady in the United States, William Notman in Canada, George Washington Wilson and Oliver Sarony in Great Britain, and Nadar (Gaspard-Félix Tournachon) and André Adolphe Eugène Disdéri in France, each had a studio of twenty-five to thirty-five employees, or was "growing" within a few years of opening. Disdéri had seventy-seven staff the year after his opening due to a special initiative for the Exposition Universelle of 1855.

All were highly praised in the photographic and popular press. Market success was seen as artistic validation, as the natural result of pure talent. For example, when Notman first opened a branch studio in Boston in the United States in 1866, on his way to heading an enterprise that would establish some twenty-six studios in North America, the *Boston Courier* insisted, "The merit of their work leaves no doubt of their success here, which is already assured."<sup>16</sup> The studio failed within two years (though another attempt several years later succeeded). Not lack of talent but, among other things, the sixty-three competing studios in Boston may have had something to do with the initial failure. Other major photo studios would suffer reverses irrespective of talent: Brady's business would deteriorate after the Civil War; Disdéri became a bankrupt. In this topos of rapid, artistically merited success then, is there actual "history," or is it a rhetorical construct produced by both photographer and audience and intended to convey an unconsciously understood message about talent?

There are other shared topoi among Victorian photographers. For example,

<sup>15</sup> Ibid., p. 17.

<sup>16</sup> Quoted in Roger Hall, Gordon Dodds, Stanley Triggs, *The World of William Notman: The Nineteenth Century Through a Master Lens* (Toronto, 1993), p. 39.

despite collective studio effort, the artistic photographer would be applauded for a “unique” talent, one admired by all; hence, paradoxically, his (or occasionally her) output would need to be conventional, understandable, and based on popular subjects, whether portraits, landscapes, genre illustration, composites, news events, or tourist views documenting geographical and ethnographical wonders. And the photographs were always in a “realistic” style, reproducing life in miniature and intended to rival the most meticulous artist. As George Washington Wilson noted, he had to “study the popular taste . . . and not only to get a pleasing picture of a place, but one also that can be recognized by the public.”<sup>17</sup>

Successful Victorian artistic photographers all had an interest in technical innovation in the service of this realism, and they worked with unflinching diligence. They also exhibited marketing acumen, exploiting advertisements and creating and patenting new products to engage consumption, and they all won many prizes and medals. The dynamic Oliver Sarony, “a man with the Midas touch,” not only patented a “posing apparatus or universal rest,” and his so-called “photocrayons” (glass transparencies backed with tinted, textured, hatched drawing paper, which he tried to license and market in the United States), but also encouraged business by showing sitters “enlarged portraits of themselves projected onto a screen in a darkened room [before they left]. . . . the fish was invariably hooked and yet another lucrative order for a coloured enlargement was safely netted.”<sup>18</sup> Mathew Brady’s friend Nathaniel Parker Willis called him “felicitously prehensile” in seizing opportunity and luring the famous to sit for him.<sup>19</sup>

As this comment suggests, the Victorian artistic photographer also deployed sophisticated social skills in client relationships. Nadar lived a bohemian life in Paris, filling his studio with curiosities and objets d’art and entertaining personalities in the arts and literature. Stories of portrait sittings — no matter how short — that led to personal friendships are common, following the topos of the understanding relationship between portrait painters and sitters. In 1895, *Celebrities Monthly* magazine described New York celebrity portrait photographer B. J. Falk this way: “In the conversations lasting from five minutes to half an hour that occur daily in his gallery, the artist has not only succeeded in seizing salient points of character and fixing them with his camera, but he has also laid the foundations of some very delightful friendships.”<sup>20</sup>

17 Naomi Rosenblum, *A World History of Photography* (New York, 1989), p. 107, quoting Ian Jeffrey, “British Photography from Fox Talbot to E. O. Hoppé,” *The Real Thing* (London, 1975), p. 16.

18 Audrey Linkman, *The Victorians: Photographic Portraits* (London, 1993), pp. 87–88.

19 Mary Panzer, *Mathew Brady and the Image of History* (Washington, D.C., 1997), pp. 9–10.

20 *Celebrities Monthly* (begun 1895), using tipped-in original B. J. Falk photographs; Library and Archives Canada. Authorship of the quoted text is anonymous, but possibly attributable to Falk himself.

The Victorian photographer also established his artistic credentials by incorporating public art displays within his commercial location, usually called a gallery, not a studio, and by working with or employing artists to touch up or to paint entirely over photographic portraits with oils, watercolor, ink, crayon, pencil, or other media. All of these studios, and the role they played as art galleries for their communities, are encapsulated in the 1877 description of Notman's studio in St. John, New Brunswick:

*The reception room was a perfect gallery of beautifully arranged pictures and chromos, and India ink copies. A number of oil paintings, some of them of considerable value, a good many choice bits of water colour, some decidedly clever engravings together with pieces of statuary, and a bronze or two.... The studio was full of handsome work, and lovers of the aesthetic whenever they had a spare minute or two always wandered into Notman's and inspected the new things he had there.*<sup>21</sup>

The connection with painters was widely cultivated: Nadar lent his recently vacated photo studio to a group of painters in April 1874, thus hosting the first group exhibition of the Impressionists. At the magnificent Gainsborough House in Scarborough, Sarony imitated portraitists of the past like Sir Joshua Reynolds in combining a working studio with a gallery; a number of rooms each displayed work in one medium, "portraits finished in oils... separated from the display of water-colours, which in turn kept a respectful distance from pictures in porcelain or Sarony's own patented photocrayons."<sup>22</sup> Notman also used his Montreal studio as a gallery (fig. 5.2), exhibiting paintings, for example, by C. J. Way and R. S. Duncanson, from both of whom he commissioned works that he then reproduced in photographs and sold. In January, 1860, the gallery was also the site of the founding meeting of the Art Association of Montreal, in which Notman took an active role.<sup>23</sup> Apart from Mathew Brady's portraits appearing as woodcuts and lithographs, his "imperial" photographs were often transformed into large oil paintings.

After the new age of late Victorian aestheticism and more particularly of Whistler, leading artistic photographers such as Alfred Stieglitz and Harold Mortimer-Lamb, among many others, would need to repudiate point-for-point the old —artist-photographer's biographical template, and to ensure that their biographies were congruent with an entirely new model. Kris and Kurz's ideas continue to hold with respect to these pictorialists, who took a position that agreed with Whistler's dismissive view of both realism and conventional photographers: "The imitator is a poor kind of creature. If the man who paints only the tree, or flower, or other surface he sees before

21 George Stewart, *The Story of the Great Fire in St. John, June 20th, 1877* (Toronto, 1877), p. 49, quoted in Ralph Greenhill and Andrew Birrell, *Canadian Photography: 1839-1920* (Toronto, 1979), p. 70.

22 Linkman, *The Victorians*, p. 87.

23 Hall, et al., *The World of William Notman*, p. 62.



FIG. 5.2 William Notman studio, 17 Bleury Street, Montreal, ca. 1875, albumen print, Library and Archives, Canada.

him were an artist, the king of artists would be the photographer.”<sup>24</sup> Whistler despised the mimetic tendency of photography, as did the pictorialists. With the almost exclusive exception of the work of David Octavius Hill and Julia Margaret Cameron, pictorialists considered there had been no art in photography prior to pictorialism.

Now let us turn to the parallels between Whistler’s well-established avant-garde persona and the formation of a public biography by the new pictorialist photographers. The template was founded on virulent opposition to an orientation around financial considerations, whether the pictorialist was amateur or professional. Success was not to be measured in the marketplace. As a corollary, the pictorialist had to deny any controlling importance to either the subject or the client in determining the final form of the work of art. Indeed, a problematic, rather than friendly or collegial relationship with a paying client was fully admissible. Taking a tendentious stand on principle, in effect presenting new art as necessarily confrontational or “difficult” art, is at the crux of public behavior for avant-garde artists.

Whistler’s life is full of anecdotes about his insistence that the artist controlled the creation, irrespective of the patron’s wishes. Not only, for example, did he demand as many sittings as he felt were needed for a portrait, he even defended in court the artist’s right to change the nature and value of the commissioned work. For example, Sir William Eden sued him because he created a more expensive portrait of Eden’s wife than expected and then kept it when Eden would not pay a sufficiently high price (*Brown and Gold: Portrait of Lady Eden*, 1894, Hunterian Art Gallery, Glasgow; YMSM 408). Two courts of law and four years later, the decision was that Whistler could keep the work but return the money Eden had already given and alter the portrait so as not to resemble its original subject.

24 Whistler, *The Gentle Art*, p. 128.

Other litigation all tended to the same end—to establish the artist's rights and controls over his art. The most notorious instance was in 1878, when Whistler sued Ruskin for accusing him of “flinging a pot of paint in the public's face” in the form of *Nocturne in Black and Gold: The Falling Rocket* (see fig. 2.1), but others occurred frequently. He quarreled with Frederick Leyland over the creation of *The Peacock Room* (see pl. 4 and pl. 5). Whistler's bankruptcy in May 1879 was the result, in part at least, of this pugnacious stand. He quarreled with Lady Meux, leaving her third portrait unfinished (1881–84, whereabouts unknown; YMSM 230). Other lawsuits were concerned, importantly for us, with establishing his image: when he was caricatured in the novel *Trilby*, he used the threat of law to have a subsequent edition emended. He wrote frequent letters to newspaper editors in acerbic exchanges compiled in *The Gentle Art of Making Enemies*, the publication of which also led to litigation to protect his copyright against the illegal exploitation of his book by an erstwhile partner.

The model Whistler established—of standing on principle and eschewing diplomacy—was repeated again and again among the pictorialists. Alfred Stieglitz, whose family money permitted independence, famously lived for art, using the commercial galleries he opened in New York far more for proselytizing his credo than for profit-making. He kept the Photo-Secession, which he founded in 1902, sacrosanct from commerce. Dorothy Norman reports his writing to one Photo-Secessionist on February 7, 1907, “Yes, you were dropped when you sent me your business card on which was printed: *Member of the Photo-Secession*. To use the Secession for advertising purposes is about the worst offence that can be committed by any of its members.”<sup>25</sup>

As this anecdote suggests, Stieglitz was in frequent disputes over his artistic principles. He insisted, for example, that only art photographers, not even artists, could judge art photos; and he did not allow the Photo-Secession exhibitions to be judged by local juries when they traveled to other venues, or reduced or altered in design or framing. His pugnacity in pursuing his own definition of art photography, which was heavily formalist, brought him into conflict with his more subject-oriented contemporaries, such as the photographers of the Camera Club of New York, where he was a member. He took the club to court when, despite his paid-up fees, they expelled him following the establishment of the Photo-Secession and his Little Galleries of the Photo-Secession at 291 Fifth Avenue, or Gallery 291. After winning his case and gaining his point, he instantly resigned.

In Canada, Sidney Carter, who was a member of Stieglitz's Photo-Secession by 1904, had uneven success in trying professional art photography. His first effort in 1907 failed after a year, despite his reputation for artistic talent and well-known

25 Dorothy Norman, *Alfred Stieglitz: An American Seer* (New York, 1990), p. 58.

subjects (fig. 5.3). During his second attempt some ten years later, he could only keep the wolf from his door by working concurrently as an art and antique dealer, notably of Asian objects such as Whistler had collected. Nevertheless, it is related that he often contrived not to sell at all to those whom he considered philistines. Finally, in 1928, Carter wrote to Stieglitz, "I still do a certain amount of professional photography but am doing less each year and with few regrets as I have always found it nerve-racking trying to please the public."<sup>26</sup> Carter's friend, Walter Mackenzie, also agonized over the client-driven position required in commercial work, and he tried to minimize its importance by emphasizing that rapport in the first instance which made of the sitter more than a stranger, more like the friends, family and self, the usual portrait subjects of the pictorialist. His method was, as he said, to "establish that bond of sympathy" and never "think about anything photographic"; when "the inner personality shimmers through the veil of flesh ... then, click!"<sup>27</sup>

In Scotland, J. Craig Annan, although as successful as his father as a professional photographer, nonetheless established his pictorialist art reputation with works done for his own interest, notably sea and landscapes such as *On a Dutch Shore* and *The Beach at Zandvoort* (fig. 5.4), which were repeatedly exhibited and published internationally between 1893 and 1906. This non-commercial orientation was typical for pictorialist photographers because the movement was largely based among amateurs, as the professional template was so inimical to them.

Unsurprisingly, given such attitudes toward commercial considerations and the self-sufficiency of the artist, another topos of this new artist template was the need to work alone, not in large studios. The pictorialist found validation less in the marketplace or among the established associations than within small, like-minded bands of co-workers who established models of artistic non-conformity.



FIG. 5.3 Sidney Carter, *Rudyard Kipling*, 1907, gelatin silver print, Library and Archives Canada, PA-135434.

26 Sidney Carter to Alfred Stieglitz, September 8, 1928, Collection of American Literature, Beinecke Rare Book and Manuscript Library, Yale University, New Haven, Conn.

27 Touchstone [Walter Mackenzie], "Photographers I Have Met," *Amateur Photographer and Photographic News* (1914), p. 250.



FIG. 5.4 J. Craig Annan, *The Beach at Zandvoort*, 1892, photogravure, Alfred Steiglitz Collection, 1949, The Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York.

Whistler's biography seems virtually to define this topos. During his youth, he and two others — Henri Fantin-Latour and Alphonse Legros — banded informally together as a brotherhood, the *Société des trois*. He showed in the famous Salon des Refusés in 1863, where his *Symphony in White, No. 1: The White Girl* (see fig. 3.3) caused a sensation second only to Manet's *Déjeuner sur l'herbe*. Then he was in the first Grosvenor Gallery show of 1877, which was a statement of opposition to the Royal Academy's conservatism. He made his reputation as much through printmaking (being at the forefront of both the etching and lithography revivals) as through painting. Late in life, he tried to work within the Society of British Artists, even becoming their president and obtaining the coveted designation of "royal" for the SBA by petitioning Queen Victoria. Then he alienated the conventionalism of many members by, among other things, his autocratic behavior, his desire to ensure exclusivity of membership, and his innovations in simplified and integrated exhibition design. These reflected his own groundbreaking solo shows, which involved all aspects of staging, including the catalogue, poster, decoration of space, hanging of images, and co-ordinated costumes for the servers and doormen (fig. 5.5).

This entire topos of peer behaviour which, by the end of the nineteenth century, had become part of a golden era of multiple art secessions was taken over in its entirety by the pictorialists, who quickly defined themselves first within conventional camera clubs, then as secessionists from them when their new ideas alienated older members. Secessionist pictorialist groups disdained medals and prizes and insisted, even autocratically, on a media-neutral value system; that is, one that claimed equally artistic results could be obtained in any art medium, including printmaking or photography. It was the sensibility of the artist that counted, not the tools and techniques. They introduced new ideas in both photographic style and exhibition design — spare, integrated, *japoniste*, Whistlerian. This was the pattern of the British Brotherhood of the Linked Ring, founded in 1892 as a secession from the Royal Photographic Society of Great Britain; it began its salons in the fall of 1893.



FIG. 5.5 *Interior of the Gallery of the British Artists, 1886/87, Visitors of the Ashmolean Museum, Oxford; M.1125.*



FIG. 5.6 Alfred Stieglitz, *View of a 291 show, with prints on wall by Heinrich Kühn, Hugo Henneberg, and Hans Watzek (the Trifolium), 1906; from Dorothy Norman, Alfred Stieglitz: An American Seer, New York, 1973, ill. 31, p. 69.*

Similarly, the fashionable Club der Amateur-Photographen was founded in Vienna in 1887 as a secession from the Photographische Gesellschaft, ten years before the Vienna Secession of artists in 1897. In turn, the Trifolium or Kleeblatt, another group of three Viennese independents (Hans Watzek, Hugo Henneberg, Heinrich Kühn), was separately active between 1897 and 1903/04 (fig. 5.6). The Gesellschaft zur Förderung der Amateur-Photographie started in Hamburg in 1893 and the Photo-Club de Paris in 1894. As mentioned, the influential American Photo-Secession was founded by Stieglitz in 1902, and in Canada, apparently inspired by Sidney Carter, the Studio Club (active 1905–7) was established along the same lines.

Carter had his own confrontations with peers both when he belonged to the Toronto Camera Club and tried to revamp their annual exhibitions according to the dictates of a pictorial art salon, and later, in 1907, when he organized Canada's first stand-alone pictorialist exhibition in the rooms of the Art Association of Montreal. The page in his catalogue that reprinted an essay by Maurice Maeterlinck, the famous Belgian Symbolist playwright and supporter of art photography, was unexpectedly glued to the facing page. This was done, as Carter wrote to Stieglitz, by the "chicken-livered secretary" of the association, who wanted no repercussions upon his organization should the show fail as an art statement. Carter had his revenge

when some five hundred people came to the opening, and the reviews were, as he said, "voluminous, entirely favourable and on the whole intelligent."<sup>28</sup>

Carter's friend Mortimer-Lamb helped to found numerous art societies and lobbied tirelessly for modern art, writing to government decision-makers and newspaper editors. He became the friend of contemporary Canadian artists, educating himself in "moderns" such as Matisse, and in 1911 becoming a lay member of the Canadian Art Club, which was founded in 1907 as a secession from the Ontario Society of Artists. Displaying some of Whistler's litigious tendency, Mortimer-Lamb admitted he nearly came to a court of libel in 1913 with the *Montreal Star's* critic Morgan Powell. This was due to Mortimer-Lamb's heated defense of a group of modern artists whom he believed had been influenced by Matisse and the post-Impressionists, among them A. Y. Jackson, who would become part of the groundbreaking Group of Seven in Canada.

Other pictorialists repeated the pattern of tendentiousness regarding principle. Reams of their magazine pages were devoted to debates over issues such as the appropriate level, value, and quantity of retouching and manipulation in printing, or whether the snapshot hand camera, as opposed to the more considered tripod camera, could produce artistic results. Ultimately, the Linked Ring disbanded in disagreements, challenged by newer, ever more abstracting and self-referential photographers such as Malcolm Arbuthnot. In the United States, Stieglitz effectively seceded from his own movement, looking to newer art modernisms and closing his Gallery 291 in 1917. In Europe, the pattern was similar; many European "photo-secessionists" were also of independent private means, and they suffered multiple breakaways. In Vienna, for example, the Trifolium was, in effect, a secession from a secession. This pattern of inevitable disagreement and split was also typical of Whistler's tumultuous life.

In the context of such secessionist groups, it is significant that, like Whistler, the photographers involved also proposed an elite status for their art. They wanted to escape their own typically middle-class lives or the banality of the everyday, and they cultivated an exclusive audience even while claiming to proselytize to the general public. Like Whistler, they used the supportive infrastructure of the exhibitions and publications they created to propose their own credibility. Whistler looked for rich patrons, yet also wanted to appeal to, even educate, a wider public, who all nevertheless shared some social pretension, and were art-viewing, newspaper-reading bourgeois reaching for the rarefied. Like Whistler himself, they were middle class, using art to join the aristocracy of feeling.

28 Sidney Carter to Alfred Stieglitz, November 26, 1907, Collection of American Literature, Beinecke Library.

Among pictorialists, Stieglitz preached an elitist message through the exquisite reproductions and design values of his magazine, *Camera Work*, as much as through its texts. He famously “held court” in his 291 Gallery, talking for hours with interested visitors. In Britain, the Links could be aristocrats or middle class, but they met on equal terms in the Linked Ring, taking pseudonyms like “Aquafortist” and “Smudger” to establish their rankless but elite society. In the catalogue for his 1907 show, Carter wrote a brief history to situate photography as an art form with a tradition, dropping the names of George Bernard Shaw, Julia Margaret Cameron, David Octavius Hill, and notably, the “great Whistler himself.” And he included portraits of prominent personalities, such as Rudyard Kipling, creating a mutually supportive elite circle — while pictorialism flattered them, their presence underwrote the credibility of the style.

Most importantly for the future of avant-garde art practice, pictorialists, like Whistler, positioned themselves deliberately in an international sphere, looking most often to England, Europe, and Japanese prints for inspiration. If not residents, several were travelers in Europe; Stieglitz was there from 1881 to 1890; Edward Steichen lived in Paris between 1900 and 1902 and again from 1906 to 1914; and F. Holland Day, Sidney Carter, and J. Craig Annan made repeated visits. They contributed to mostly pictorialist magazines, such as *Photograms of the Year*, which were international in scope. Pictorialist exhibitions, whether organized by pictorialist clubs or others, introduced a wider general public to the new ideas in photography: J. Craig Annan’s large and successful 1901 international exhibition of pictorialist photography took place in Glasgow as part of the opening of the new art gallery there. The banner year of 1902 saw Alfred Stieglitz founding not only the Photo-Secession in New York, but also Gallery 291, and a giant retrospective of international pictorialism in Buffalo in 1910 was hugely successful with the public. Pictorialists proposed an art that was to transcend localism as much as class and media hierarchies, again like the great expatriate Whistler, and like the art secessions in Europe, which were criticized for lack of proper nationalism and patriotism, particularly in Germany.<sup>29</sup> While earlier Victorian photographers also took pride in international reputations, they did not seek to deny the nationalism of their art, its local inspiration or site-specificity, particularly in landscape. The idea that the best art is essentialist, and rises above nationalism, seen as parochialism, is still entrenched, leading frequently to the continuing transcendent isolation and decontextualization of art objects.

29 Jensen.

A final word might also be said to highlight the unconventional, even bohemian, traits of personality associated with both Whistler and the pictorial photographers. Whistler's biography is classic for an avant-garde artist: involved with mistresses until he finally married at fifty-four, he also cultivated an unconventional personal appearance and allowed his temper to estrange him from friends and relatives such as Oscar Wilde and Francis Seymour Haden, his brother-in-law. The frequent quarrels of Stieglitz and others have already been mentioned; equally, they often took lovers and mistresses, occasionally marrying them, as Stieglitz did with Georgia O'Keeffe, and Mortimer-Lamb with Eva Weatherbie. There were many collectors and unique personalities among them: F. Holland Day, for example, was a collector of Keats, an aesthete and an eccentric; while George Davison became an anarchist who indulged his politics on the basis of his hefty fortune, made when working as a manager for Kodak.

The consistency and the scope of the multiple biographical topoi that pictorialists shared with Whistler, quite apart from the additional evident similarities of style and aesthetic conviction in their works, must give his influence new weight. The pictorialists certainly had other role models besides Whistler, but with Whistler, the parallels are especially striking, particularly since the rise of pictorialism coincides, as previously noted, with the establishment of Whistler's reputation, beginning in the mid-1880s and culminating with the memorial retrospective exhibitions in Boston (1904), London (1905), and Paris (1905). Indeed, the pictorialists' similarity to the now-apotheosized Whistler could account, in part at least, for the growing public appreciation of pictorialist exhibitions. Like the Impressionists and Symbolists, Whistler was now among the "safe" avant garde, or what Robert Jensen has referred to as the "juste milieu" positioned between empty academicism and inaccessible modernism.<sup>30</sup> These shared tropes of style, aesthetics, and, arguably, public behavior, tend to validate once again Kris and Kurtz's concept of unconscious, enacted biography, a life fashioned as persuasive rhetoric. Whistler's example helped guide pictorialist photographers in thrusting their medium into an oppositional, or avant-garde position vis-à-vis both traditional photography and traditional art, which was so unwilling to give photography a place. Whistler's example helped them to underwrite that claim through their lives as much as their work. Casting their role as defenders of the true art in photography, pictorialists made themselves not so much "valiant knights of Daguerre,"<sup>31</sup> as Sadakichi Hartmann dubbed them, as knights of the man Sidney Carter praised in his 1907 catalogue — "the great Whistler himself."

<sup>30</sup> Ibid.

<sup>31</sup> Harry W. Lawton and George Knox, eds., *The Valiant Knights of Daguerre: Selected Critical Essays on Photography and Profiles of Photographic Pioneers by Sadakichi Hartman* (Berkeley and London, 1978).

# Whistler's French Critics

Joy Newton

*James McNeill Whistler... a pris une importance internationale dans l'art contemporain. Trois grandes nations s'en disputent la gloire: l'Amérique où il est né, l'Angleterre où il a longtemps vécu et où il est mort, et la France où il s'est fixé, où il avait toutes ses amitiés et où il a été jugé de suite à son mérite.*

Léonce Bénédict<sup>1</sup>

Whistler turned toward France in the 1880s in the hope of critical acclaim and official recognition for a number of reasons: There was his own disillusion with the British art scene, coupled with the negative public reaction to his lawsuit against Ruskin in 1878; There was the fact that he needed to find a market elsewhere after his Pyrrhic victory of winning the case and being bankrupted by the costs; Finally, there was the loosening of family ties in England with the death of his mother in 1881. As Bénédict suggests, Whistler found what he was looking for: in France, Whistler operated within a social network that provided a favorable interpretive community for his painting that effectively wrote him into the history of French art.

A comparison between Whistler's standing in Great Britain and his critical reception in France clarifies his position in the 1880s. While he had some supporters in England,<sup>2</sup> his work was not receiving the acclaim he would have wished. In 1881 the *Liverpool Daily Post* said that his works were "dismal in the extreme," while the reviewer in *Pan* did not approve of his "deliberate incompleteness."<sup>3</sup> When he exhibited his Venice etchings at the Fine Art Society in December 1880, the *World* said they were "mere suggestions" and "vague first intentions," while the *Spectator* said, "This was drawing of a very slovenly master."<sup>4</sup>

1 "In contemporary art Whistler has assumed international status. Three great nations lay claim to him: America, where he was born, England, where he spent much of his life and where he died, and France where he settled, where all his closest friends were, and where he was given the appreciation he deserved." Léonce Bénédict, *Exposition internationale de 1900 à Paris, Rapport du Jury international: Deuxième partie: Beaux-Arts* (Paris, 1904), p. 590.

2 The *Daily Telegraph* (May 16, 1865) praised "the harmony and subdued sweetness of [his] colour," while the *Examiner* (February 24, 1877) maintained that *The Peacock Room* showed "vitality in every line, a freshness in every touch"; according to The Times (December 25, 1880), he was "genuine and original"; while Walter Dowdeswell in the *Art Journal* (April 1887, p. 97) perceived "the solution of great problems of colour and line" in his work and admired his "exquisite sensibility."

3 *Liverpool Daily Post* (May 3, 1881); *Pan* (February 5, 1881).

4 *World* (December 2 and 8, 1880); *Spectator* (December 11, 1880).

Furthermore, the artist's flamboyant personality and immense talent for self-advertisement were not appreciated in Victorian Britain: the critic of the *Artist* dismissed him as "little appreciated and much laughed at," while the *Daily Telegraph* maintained that "Whistler is an amiable eccentric who is tacitly allowed to anticipate even the first of April."<sup>5</sup> Whistler was well aware of such reactions as he subscribed to a press service. Indeed, the reviews cited here are all taken from his personal collection of cuttings in Glasgow University Library's Special Collections.

Whistler had given up regular visits to Paris as early as 1868, but his work continued to be well known by writers, artists, and critics there in the 1880s. The haunting presence of one work in particular, his *Symphony in White, No. 1: The White Girl* (see fig. 3.3), which had made such an impact on respected critics such as Charles Baudelaire, Etienne-Joseph-Théophile Thoré (who wrote his art criticism under the pseudonym William Bürger), Arthur Stevens, and Philippe Burty at the Salon des Refusés in 1863, was still recalled some twenty years later by the novelist and art critic Emile Zola in his novel *L'Oeuvre* as a "très curieuse vision d'un oeil de grand artiste."<sup>6</sup> Zola was not alone in admiring Whistler.

New champions emerged in the 1880s and 1890s who not only helped him acquire a strong following but also became tantamount to a personal mafia. This group of writers, critics, and devotees included Théodore Duret, Roger Marx, Léonce Bénédite, Robert de Montesquiou, Octave Mirbeau, Stéphane Mallarmé, Méry Laurent, J.-K. Huysmans, and Gustave Geffroy. In short, Whistler's French admirers included some of the leading figures of the French avant-garde. We learn from their publications and many of the letters preserved in Whistler's correspondence that they had certain features in common. In the main, for example, all of them were admirers and often major collectors of avant-garde painting and sculpture, and they shared some of Whistler's own enthusiasms, such as a deep interest in the art of Japan (see 7. *Whistler's Japanese Connections*). One other constant factor emerges about this rather diverse group, which included a wine merchant, a French

5 *Artist* (June 1884); *Daily Telegraph* (February 21, 1885).

6 "Baudelaire trouve cela charmant, charmant, exquise délicatesse" (Baudelaire finds it absolutely charming, exquisitely delicate); Henri Fantin-Latour to Whistler, May 15, 1863, GUL F12, GUW 01081. Bürger stated unequivocally it was "une espèce de chef d'oeuvre. [...] Il y a aussi je ne sais quoi de Goya et presque de Velasquez dans l'aspect fantastique de cette femme droite et effilée" (in its way a masterpiece [...] there is also a hint of Goya and even Velázquez in the extraordinary appearance of this slender and erect female figure); *Salons 1861-1868* (Paris, 1870), pp. 408, 421. Arthur Stevens, writing under the pseudonym of J. Graham in *Le Figaro* (July 16, 1863), found it "l'une des oeuvres les plus saisissantes de l'Exposition" (one of the most striking works in the exhibition). Philippe Burty, *La Presse* (May 17, 1863), said it was "Le succès de l'Exposition. [...] C'est une peinture d'une distinction de tons et d'une saveur tout à fait étrange" (The most successful painting in the exhibition ... with its distinguished color tones and strange appeal). Zola evokes the Salon des Refusés in *L'Oeuvre* (1886), *Les Rougon-Macquart*, vol. 4 (Paris, 1966), p. 124: "a very curious vision seen with the eye of a great artist."

nobleman, an impoverished school-teacher, and a grand courtesan: they all knew each other—and their unstinting and often coordinated support contributed immensely and in varying ways to Whistler's establishment as a major artist on the continent.

First and foremost in this group was the influential art critic and collector Théodore Duret (1838–1927), who came to see Whistler in November 1880, armed with a letter of introduction from Manet.<sup>7</sup> Duret, who was largely responsible for starting the revival of Whistler's career in France, was a fascinating individual who escaped and fled the country after being condemned to death during the Paris Commune in 1871. He spent the next two years traveling in America, India, and Java, and journeyed intrepidly through China and Japan, building up his art collection as he went.<sup>8</sup> After this, he helped run the family cognac business, but really devoted himself to further travel, writing, and collecting paintings, mostly by Whistler and the Impressionists.

After seeing Whistler's work in his London studio, Duret focused attention on him in France by publishing a long general essay in the prestigious *Gazette des Beaux-Arts* in 1881, where he, like Zola, recalled the *Symphony in White*, saying that it was "l'oeuvre d'un homme né peintre, doué d'une vision absolument propre."<sup>9</sup> He also



FIG. 6.1 *Arrangement en couleur chair et noir*: Portrait of Théodore Duret, 1883/84, Catharine Lorillard Wolfe Collection, Wolfe Fund, 1913, The Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York; YMSM 252; ©The Metropolitan Museum of Art/Art Resource, NY.

7 Edouard Manet to Whistler, November 22, [1880], GUL M257a, GUW 03985. Margaret F. MacDonald and Joy Newton, eds., "Letters from the Whistler Collection, University of Glasgow: Correspondence with French Painters," *Gazette des Beaux-Arts* (December 1986), pp. 201–14.

8 See his *Voyage en Asie* (Paris, 1874).

9 "The work of a man born just to paint, gifted with his own absolutely unique vision." Théodore Duret, "James Whistler," *Gazette des Beaux-Arts* 23 (April 1881), pp. 365–69, reprinted in T. Duret, *Critique d'Avant-Garde* (Paris, 1885), pp. 245–60.

praised Whistler's more recent work, particularly his nocturnes and spare evocations of Venice, admiring his boldness in taking painting to new limits: "il est . . . arrivé avec ces nocturnes à l'extrême limite de la peinture formulée."<sup>10</sup> Over the next few years Duret helped Whistler maintain a high profile in France by stating categorically in further studies in the *Gazette des Beaux-Arts* and elsewhere that Whistler was one of the foremost British painters and that his works reached an unsurpassable peak of perfection.<sup>11</sup>

Duret's enthusiastic comments were appreciated by Whistler, and it is hardly surprising that he became a lifelong friend of the American painter, as well as a patron. He purchased a number of works, including his own portrait, *Arrangement en couleur chair et noir: Portrait of Théodore Duret* (fig. 6.1), which was exhibited in 1885 at the Paris Salon, where Whistler had again begun to exhibit regularly and to increasing public acclaim. The critic Gustave Geffroy, reviewing Whistler's entries to the Salon that year, focused on the psychological realism of these "œuvres de si fine psychologie, de vérité si fière, de si hautaine étrangeté" and praised the subtlety of the portrait of their mutual friend Duret, who was depicted by Whistler "debout, droit, fin, le visage sagace, évoquant une fête mondaine."<sup>12</sup> Among other works Duret owned were *Trouville* (1865, Art Institute of Chicago; YMSM 70), *Nocturne in Black and Gold: The Gardens* (ca. 1876, The Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York; YMSM 166), and *Nocturne: Trafalgar Square — Snow* (1875–77, Freer Gallery of Art Washington, D.C.; YMSM 173). It says a great deal for the strength of Whistler's liking for him that the friendship survived when financial problems forced Duret to sell part of his huge art collection in 1894 — including Whistler's *Nocturne in Grey and Silver* (see fig. 4.18).<sup>13</sup>

Duret always remained in close contact with Whistler and supported him virtually unconditionally to the end. Indeed, Duret came to London to see him in 1903 a few days before he died.<sup>14</sup> He brought out one of the first major studies of the life and work of his old friend in the following year.<sup>15</sup> Not all of the enthusiastic reviews

10 "In these nocturnes he has succeeded in taking painting to the extreme limits of representational art." Ibid., pp. 366, 368.

11 Ibid. See also *Gazette des Beaux-Arts* 24 (June 1882); *Les Lettres et les Arts* (February 1, 1888).

12 "Works which combine a subtle understanding of psychology, a proud truthfulness, and a strange remoteness"; "Standing upright, the face fine-featured and shrewd, dressed formally for a high society reception." *La Vie artistique*, 1<sup>ère</sup> série (Paris, 1892), p. 276.

13 *Vente: Collection T. Duret*, auction catalogue (March 19, 1894), Galerie Georges Petit, 8 rue de Sèze, Paris, 1894. He may also have owned *Alice Butt (I)* (1883; private collection; YMSM 437), possibly given to him by Whistler in 1883, but see YMSM 437 concerning the disputed date.

14 When Whistler died Duret went to see the Pennells (*Life*, vol. 2, p. 301), who said "his grief [was] intense at the loss of the last of his old comrades — Manet had gone, then Zola, and now Whistler, with whom the best hours of his life were spent."

15 T. Duret, *Histoire de J. McNeill Whistler et de son oeuvre* (Paris, 1904).

Whistler received in France were due to Duret, though he was the undisputed trail-blazer for the critics of the 1880s.

Another powerful critic who echoed Duret's praise was Roger Marx (1859–1913), who helped further Whistler's career in France in several ways. First, Marx was a patron: he was a serious collector whose sale catalogue on his death in 1913 included an impressive range of works by the Impressionists and seventeen Whistler etchings.<sup>16</sup> Secondly, this private collection became an important showcase for the American artist. Not only was it highly visible — Marx was gregarious and often entertained artists, fellow-writers, and collectors at his home in the rue de Valois — but inclusion in it was very significant, simply because of who Marx was.<sup>17</sup> In the 1880s Roger Marx held increasingly important posts in the Ministry for the Arts and in 1889 he was appointed *Inspecteur principal des musées départementaux*, so both his private collection and his public endorsement of an artist's work in his reviews offered a virtually official seal of approval from the establishment in Paris — exactly what Whistler had been unable to find in London. In 1884, for example, Marx called Whistler “l'une des individualités les plus étonnantes de l'art moderne”; and in 1890 he expressed great approval of the delicate tonalities, the “modulations affinées et exquises” of the paintings he sent to the Salon.<sup>18</sup> These were *Nocturne in Blue and Gold: Valparaiso Bay* (1866–ca.1874, Freer Gallery of Art, Washington, D.C.; YMSM 76) and *Nocturne in Black and Gold: The Fire Wheel* (1872–77, Tate Britain, London; YMSM 169).

Marx's colleague, Léonce Bénédict (1859–1925), who was appointed *Conservateur en chef* of the Musée du Luxembourg in Paris in 1889, had a similar response when evoking the subtle qualities of Whistler's work in his review of the 1890 Salon: “Les Nocturnes de M. Whistler sont d'une poésie fort pénétrante.”<sup>19</sup> It was Bénédict who, in consultation with Duret, subsequently prepared the Whistler memorial exhibition of 1905 at the Ecole des Beaux-Arts.<sup>20</sup>

16 The Whistlers are listed in “Estampes,” *Vente Marx*, auction catalogue (April 27–May 13, 1914), Hôtel Drouot et Galerie Manzi-Joyant, lot nos. 1411–31. The sale of paintings included works by Boudin, Carrière, Cassatt, Daumier, Degas, Fantin-Latour, Lautrec, Lépine, Manet, Renoir, Monet, Redon, Seurat, Steinlen, Tissot, and Vuillard.

17 Marx's correspondence with Rodin, for example, includes many invitations to meals either *en famille* or with fellow guests such as the artist Théodule Augustin Ribot or Charles Ephrussi, editor of the *Gazette des Beaux-Arts* and fellow collector; see Joy Newton, “Auguste Rodin and Roger Marx,” *The French-American Review* 63 (Spring 1992), pp. 50–61.

18 “One of the most amazing and outstanding talents in the whole of modern art,” *Le Progrès artistique* (June 6, 1884); “the exquisitely delicate tonalities...,” *Le Public* (May 1, 1890).

19 “Whistler's nocturnes have haunting poetic qualities,” *La Nouvelle Revue* (May 1, 1890).

20 Bénédict wrote “Artistes contemporains: Whistler,” *Gazette des Beaux-Arts* 33 (1905), pp. 403–10, 496–11; 34 (1905), pp. 142–58, 231–46. For consultations over the exhibition, initially scheduled for 1902, see Théodore Duret to Whistler, July 26, 1901 and October 6, 1902, GUL D201 and 206, GUW 00995 and 01000.

In addition to these “officials and swells” — Whistler’s term for those who held government appointments in the art world, or who were professional art critics — there was a network of friends and contacts who were first and foremost poets and novelists, who also wrote on art either for the newspapers or in collections of essays.<sup>21</sup> These included Montesquiou, Mirbeau, Mallarmé, Huysmans, and Geffroy.

It was a fellow expatriate American, the novelist Henry James, who introduced Whistler to comte Robert de Montesquiou-Fezensac (1855–1921), in 1885.<sup>22</sup> He was a Symbolist poet, sometime painter, and designer who collaborated with Emile Gallé and René Lalique. He also contributed some of his more eccentric features to the characters of des Esseintes in J.-K. Huysmans’s *A Rebours* and Marcel Proust’s Baron Charlus in *A la Recherche du temps perdu*. Moreover, he was one of the finest art critics of the fin de siècle, who produced a book on Paul Helleu and distinguished essays on Gustave Moreau, Auguste Rodin, Edward Burne-Jones, Alfred Stevens, Aubrey Beardsley, and of course Whistler.<sup>23</sup>

Montesquiou’s support took several forms: first of all, he commissioned his portrait, *Arrangement in Black and Gold: Comte Robert de Montesquiou-Fezensac* (pl. 11). Whistler’s interpretation of Montesquiou’s preciousity was a success at the Paris Salon of 1894, when Geffroy said: “Rarement plus parfait accord fut réalisé entre un peintre et son modèle.... Il est incontestable qu[e] ... le peintre a fait un chef d’œuvre.”<sup>24</sup> Secondly, Montesquiou offered Whistler an immediate entrée into European high society (and hence to potential patrons) and put him in touch with his other friends in artistic circles by inviting him to social occasions either at his home or that of his cousin, comtesse Greffulhe, who was the reigning queen of Belle Epoque Parisian society.<sup>25</sup> Thirdly, Montesquiou had a positive genius for making fashionable the artists he admired, and by the 1890s he was known as the ultimate arbiter of taste in Paris. He took Whistler and a group of friends, who included the comtesse Greffulhe, Madame de Montebello, a Russian princess, “and a whole bouquet of princes” to Goupil’s, the art dealer’s, to admire Whistler’s paintings; it was,

21 Whistler to Beatrix Whistler, [January 30, 1892], GUL W601, G UW 06608.

22 See Joy Newton, *La Chauve-souris et le papillon: Correspondance Montesquiou-Whistler* (Glasgow, 1990), p. 37.

23 Paul Helleu, *peintre et graveur* (Paris, 1913). Among his many studies on contemporary art, essays on Gallé and Lalique appeared in *Les Roseaux pensants* (Paris, 1897); on Burne-Jones in *Autels privilégiés* (Paris, 1898); on Beardsley in *Professionnelles Beautés* (Paris, 1905); on Moreau and Rodin in *Altesses sérénissimes* (Paris, 1907); on Stevens in *Gazette des Beaux-Arts* (1900), pp. 100–118 and in *Diptyque de Flandres, triptyque de France* (Paris, 1921); and on Whistler in his memoirs, *Les Pas effacés* (Paris, 1923).

24 “Rarely has there been such harmony between a painter and his model.... Without a shadow of a doubt the artist has produced a masterpiece.” *La Justice* (April 25, 1894).

25 Montesquiou took Whistler to meet the influential collector, the duc d’Aumale, at Chantilly (*Le Journal des Artistes*, July 2, 1892) and told him of a possible commission (January 3, 1895, GUL M427; G UW 04157), though this was not pursued because of his wife’s illness.

said the painter in a letter home to Beatrix, "the final triumph ... Un succes colossal! to be spread all over Paris in the next few hours."<sup>26</sup>

The poet left a fine tribute to Whistler in his private papers, where he says, "Whistler fut Whistler, un des êtres que j'ai le plus admirés, comme individu et comme artiste."<sup>27</sup> Indeed, in flattering imitation of Whistler's butterfly, he adopted the name of "la Chauve-souris" (the Bat), which is how his friend addressed him in letters. Perhaps more than any other, he made clear to the artist on a personal level how well his work was understood, both in his poetic transpositions of individual canvases and in his own dealings with him: in 1892, when Whistler allowed the sitter to see how work on his portrait was proceeding, the artist wrote to his wife, "Montesquiou was of course simply heroic ... and childlike in his joy — It really was without precedent in my experience — for expression of such sympathy is unknown to me hitherto and impossible in England."<sup>28</sup>

Another member of Whistler's Paris network was the novelist and critic Octave Mirbeau (1848–1917), who praised the American artist's work at every opportunity, beginning in 1882, when he said that the portrait of Lady Meux was "une belle, simple et grande oeuvre."<sup>29</sup> He was a personal friend by May 1888, when Whistler invited him along with Mallarmé to dinner, and he was even asked in 1895 to act as Whistler's second in the proposed duel with George Moore.<sup>30</sup> Concerning the portraits of Duret and Lady Archibald Campbell (see fig. 8.2) in the 1885 Salon, Mirbeau stated unequivocally that he need not fear competition in this field, for "Whistler, avec le charme sans rival de ses tonalités exquises, est un portraitiste de race."<sup>31</sup> He returned to the portrait of Lady Archibald Campbell again later in the same newspaper and affirmed that this work had "ce qui manque à presque tous les portraits exposés: le style."<sup>32</sup> It was another mutual friend, Rodin, who forwarded this cutting to Whistler,

26 Whistler to Beatrix Whistler, [January 27, 1892?] and [January 24, 1892?], GUL W596 and W599, GUW 06606 and GUW 06603.

27 "Whistler was Whistler, one of the people I most admired, both as a man and as an artist." Fonds Montesquiou, Bibliothèque nationale, Paris, N.A.F. 15335, f. 13.

28 Whistler to Beatrix Whistler, [January 31, 1892?], GUL W602, GUW 06003.

29 "A beautiful, simple, great work of art." *Paris-Journal* (May 4, 1882), reprinted in *Premières chroniques esthétiques*, P. Michel, ed. (Angers, 1996), p. 323. *Arrangement in Black: Lady Meux* (1881, Honolulu Academy of Arts, Hawaii; YMSM 228) was exhibited at the Salon, 1882 (catalogue no. 2687), as "Portrait of M. Harry-Men [sic]."

30 See H. Mondor and L. J. Austin, eds., *Correspondance Mallarmé* (Paris, 1959–85), vol. 3, p. 202. See also on the duel: F. Vielé-Griffin to George Moore and O. Mirbeau to Whistler, March 15, 1895 and [March 19, 1895], GUL M351 and M352, GUW 04081 and 04082. For an invitation to lunch, see [1893/1894], GUL M350, GUW 04080.

31 "The unparalleled charm of his color harmonies makes Whistler an artist of great distinction." *La France* (April 9, 1885).

32 "What is lacking in almost all the other portraits exhibited: style." *La France* (May 26, 1885).



FIG. 6.2 Stéphane Mallarmé, 1892, Freer Gallery of Art, Washington, D.C; C.60.

who became his closest friend in France (fig. 6.2). Although Mallarmé did not publish reviews of Whistler's work, he was instrumental in promoting it: he translated the *Ten O'Clock* lecture for *La Revue indépendante* in May 1888 and thus helped disseminate in France Whistler's aesthetic credo, which in some ways coincided with the concepts Mallarmé applied to his own poetry, particularly the tendency toward paring back, distilling, and refining images. Whistler made a number of etchings, drypoints, and lithographs of Mallarmé<sup>37</sup> and also painted his daughter Geneviève in 1897 (*Rose et gris: Geneviève Mallarmé*, 1897, private collection; YMSM 485). Some of Mallarmé's art collection (which included these portraits and other works by his friends Manet, Renoir, Gauguin, Monet, and Whistler) can be seen in contemporary photographs on the walls of the apartment in the rue de Rome<sup>38</sup> where he had literary and artistic gatherings every Tuesday

who said: "Il est rare d'avoir un défenseur comme lui."<sup>33</sup> In 1886 Mirbeau maintained that *Arrangement in Black: Portrait of Señor Pablo de Sarasate* (see fig. 8.3) was one of the most beautiful works in the Paris Salon,<sup>34</sup> and in 1887 he again praised the subtlety, originality, and refinement of Whistler's portraits, comparing his etchings on view at the Exposition Internationale in the rue de Sèze to those of Rembrandt.<sup>35</sup> Mirbeau himself also had a very large collection of works of art by Cézanne, Renoir, Monet, Pissarro, Lautrec, Rodin, and Whistler.<sup>36</sup>

In 1888 the American artist got to know another Symbolist poet, Stéphane Mallarmé (1842–1898), a schoolteacher

33 "It's rare to have a defender like him." Whistler to Rodin, [June 1885?], Archives du Musée Rodin, Paris, G UW 09413. See Newton and MacDonald, "Letters from the Whistler Collection," pp. 115–23.

34 Dorment and MacDonald, p. 46.

35 "Son art, original et raffiné, cache une pensée aiguë sous des grâces de dandy" (His art is original and refined and its elegance conceals great depth); *Gil Blas* (May 13, 1887). Whistler exhibited in the rue de Sèze with Monet, Rodin, Sisley, Pissarro, Berthe Morisot and Raffaelli.

36 *Vente Mirbeau*, auction catalogue (February 24 and March 21, 1919), Durand-Ruel, Paris. Gustave Geffroy recalls seeing works by Van Gogh at his home, *Les Cahiers d'aujourd'hui* (1923), p.103.

37 Whistler to Beatrix Whistler, [October 28/29, 1891], GUL W594, G UW 06601.

38 See J. M. Nectoux, "L'Ami des peintres," *Magazine littéraire*, no. 368 (September 1998), p. 43.

evening and which Whistler attended when he was in Paris. Support for Whistler was very strong among Mallarmé's adherents, who included writers such as Huysmans, Geffroy, Mirbeau, Camille Maclair,<sup>39</sup> Zola, and Duret.

In October 1891 Mallarmé helped engineer a meeting between Whistler and the novelist J.-K. Huysmans (1848–1907) during dinner at the home of Méry Laurent, the muse who inspired both Mallarmé's love poetry and thirteen works by Manet. She is known best from Manet's portrait of her as *L'Automne* (1882, Musée des Beaux-Arts, Nancy).<sup>40</sup> Laurent (1849–1900), one of the most celebrated courtesans of her time, was an important catalyst in promoting the work of artists and writers in fin-de-siècle Paris, because it was in her salon, surrounded by her own collection of works by Whistler, Manet, Gauguin, Henri Gervex, Antoine-Louis Barye, and Antoine Bourdelle, that some of the foremost artists, writers, and critics used to gather. She had an apartment in the rue de Rome, a few doors down from Mallarmé, and a villa in the Bois de Boulogne. Her aficionados included Manet, Gervex, Odilon Redon, Mallarmé, Montesquiou, George Moore, Antonin Proust, the former minister for the arts, Duret, and Huysmans. Marcel Proust met Whistler in her salon and used him in part as the inspiration for his painter Elstir in *A la Recherche du temps perdu*.<sup>41</sup> As well as contributing in this way to his future legend, Méry Laurent actively supported Whistler in his own lifetime, as she collected prints by him and it was at her instigation that her lover, the wealthy collector Dr. Thomas Evans, purchased some of Whistler's lithographs and provided information about him in *The American Register*, the newspaper he published in Paris.<sup>42</sup>

39 Camille Maclair (1872–1945) was also a friend of Rodin, Geffroy, and Huysmans. It was at Mallarmé's apartment that he met Whistler, who inspired in part his creation of the painter Niels Elstir in his novel *Le Soleil des Morts* (Paris, 1898). He praised Whistler's art in his studies in *La Revue des Revues* (April 1 and 16, 1900).

40 For details of her connections with artists and writers, see Joy Newton, "Méry Laurent, Icon of the fin de siècle," in *Essays in French Literature* 40 (November 2003), pp. 141–79; reprinted in French in *Méry Laurent, Manet, Mallarmé et les autres* (Musée des Beaux-Arts de Nancy, 2005), pp. 9–33.

41 Proust also used canvases by artists such as Monet and Whistler as the source for some of his descriptive sequences; see *A la Recherche du temps perdu*, vol. 1 (Paris 1968), pp. 168–70, inspired by Monet's *Nymphéas*, and p. 805, Proust's *Harmonie gris et rose*, which evokes variations on a Whistler seascape.

42 Whistler sent her a copy of Duret's study on him and an illustration of *Arrangement in Grey and Black: Portrait of the Painter's Mother*, both with dedications. Mme Laurent asked Edouard Dujardin to send her "les quatre dessins par Whistler publiés par la Revue indépendante" (Méry Laurent to Dujardin, June 2, 1887, Bibliothèque littéraire Jacques Doucet, Paris, MNR MS 1730). These prints accompanied Duret's review of Frederick Wedmore's catalogue of Whistler's etchings, *La Revue indépendante* (February 1887), pp. 255–59. Evans bought two lithographs by Whistler and Mallarmé's letters indicate that Mme Laurent showed the portfolio to another friend to promote further purchases: see Stéphane Mallarmé to Whistler, February 14, [1891], April 5, 1891 and June 26, 1891, collection H. Mondor, published in *Correspondance Mallarmé*, vol. 4, pp. 196, 218, 256, GUV 13452–13454. She encouraged Evans to publish information about Whistler in his paper, for Mallarmé told him "J'y veillerai, notre amie Méry de son côté et je vous enverrai le numéro paru" (I'll see to it and so will our friend Méry, and I'll send you the issue when it comes out), [May 1889], *ibid.*, vol. 4, p. 118. *The American Register* mentioned *The Gentle Art* on March 8, 19, April 26, and June 14, 1890, while the issue for January 11, 1890 had publicized details of Whistler's latest skirmish with Oscar Wilde.

When Madame Laurent invited Whistler to meet J.-K. Huysmans, she also helped consolidate the writer's deep admiration for the American artist. Huysmans devoted sensitive commentaries to his work in his reviews and collected essays *L'Art moderne* (1883) and *Certains* (1889). In the latter, for example, he described Whistler's work as "exquise, toute personnelle, toute neuve" and declared that the portrait of his mother was "une joie pour les yeux."<sup>43</sup> The *Nocturne: Blue and Gold — Southampton Water* (1872, Art Institute of Chicago; YMSM 117) he described as "représentant une vue de la Tamise au-dessus de laquelle, dans une féerique brume, une lune d'or éclaire de ses pâles rayons l'indistincte forme des vaisseaux endormis à l'ancre."<sup>44</sup>

Gustave Geffroy (1855–1926) was another member of Mallarmé's circle.<sup>45</sup> He was one of the most perspicacious and prolific art historians of the late nineteenth century, as well as being a journalist, novelist, playwright and biographer of Monet. In his review of the 1890 Salon he wrote a long appreciation of Whistler's artistic diversity, commenting, "[Whistler] est toujours lui-même et pourtant ne se répète pas à la façon des autres. Chaque fois on perçoit une sensation différente, une étude attentive.... C'est infiniment délicat et tendre. Par un prodige de sensibilité et de virtuosité, la nuit reste despotique et mystérieuse, tout en étant clarifiée et pénétrée de lumière."<sup>46</sup> In his 1891 Salon review he emphasized the weight of the support for Whistler by referring the readers to other important studies, notably those by his friend Duret, and also mentioned that Whistler's most striking painting, which was in Duret's collection, was *Nocturne in Grey and Silver* (see fig. 4.18).<sup>47</sup> Indeed, it was armed with Duret's letter of introduction that Geffroy went to see Whistler when he was in London in November 1890, and he paid him an elegant

43 "Exquisite, totally personal, totally new"; "a delight to look at"; *Certains* (Paris, 1889), pp. 287 and 283. He sent Whistler a copy of *A. Rebour's*, with the dedication "A M. James Whistler [sic], (un de ses fervents) [one of his devotees], J.-K. Huysmans." GUL W63.

44 "Representing a view of the Thames, over which a golden moon shrouded in a magical mist casts pale moonbeams over the vague outlines of vessels slumbering at anchor"; *L'Art moderne* (Paris, 1883); *Certains* (Paris, 1889); quotation from *Certains*, p. 72. YMSM 117 goes into the misidentification of the subject at length.

45 Geffroy, Mirbeau, Huysmans, Rodin, and Monet had monthly get-togethers, known as the "dîners de la banlieue" (suburban dinners) with other artists and writers.

46 "Whistler is always recognizably Whistler but he does not repeat himself as others do. Each time, you sense something different, some special observation.... His art is infinitely delicate and subtle. By a remarkable feat of sheer brilliance and sensitivity, he makes the night seem despotic and mysterious and yet also clearly defined and imbued with light." *La Vie artistique*, vol. 1 (1891), p. 158 (on the Salon of 1890).

47 In his article in *La Justice* (July 1, 1891) on the Société nationale des Beaux-Arts, he refers to Duret's article on Whistler in *Les Lettres et les Arts*, vol. 1 (1888), pp. 215–26. On Whistler's most striking painting: "[U]n deux surtout, chez Théodore Duret, le plus hardi et le plus extraordinaire peut-être" (I think one of the ones belonging to Théodore Duret is probably the boldest and most extraordinary); *La Vie artistique*, p. 269.

compliment when he described his journey across the Channel as though it were a Whistler seascape.<sup>48</sup>

It was largely thanks to the joint efforts of these friends and contacts, especially Mallarmé and Duret, that Whistler was nominated *Chevalier de la Légion d'honneur* in 1889.<sup>49</sup> Whistler was in London when he received notification of the award, and he instantly dispatched Montesquiou to send him the decoration; his signature butterfly is seen in a letter to comtesse Greffulhe sporting the red decoration of the *chevalier* at this time.<sup>50</sup>

Two years later Whistler's supporters, in a further concerted effort, succeeded in engineering the purchase by the French state of *Arrangement in Grey and Black: Portrait of the Painter's Mother* (fig. 6.3). They made strategic overtures to all the right people: Mallarmé went to see his friend Henry Roujon, an important government official at the ministry; Montesquiou contrived to introduce Whistler to the minister for the arts; and further support came from Duret and from Geffroy, whom Mallarmé arranged for Whistler to see again. Geffroy's friend Georges Clemenceau, the politician, was also enlisted to help with the complicated machinations backstage.<sup>51</sup> Geffroy himself published two well-timed and highly complimentary assessments, in which he described Whistler as "un des maîtres de la peinture contemporaine et de la peinture de tous les temps" and also called for the acquisition of the painting. He defined "cette oeuvre de beauté souveraine" unequivocally as

48 Geffroy was in London to review current exhibitions. "Ce fut un féérique jardin suspendu dans la nuit, entre l'eau et le ciel dévinés, un jardin où s'épanouissaient des fleurs d'or, des fleurs de lumière, des fleurs de feu [...]. Il était bien impossible que la songerie d'un art ne vint pas à la pensée, qu'un nom de magicien ne montât pas aux lèvres: un Whistler" (It was like some enchanted garden hovering in the dark, barely visible between water and sky, a garden in which flowers of gold, flowers of light, flowers of fire were in bloom [...]. It was impossible not to think of one particular type of art — the magical art of Whistler); *La Vie artistique*, vol. 1 (1891), p. 268. His Salon review for 1891 was very enthusiastic: "La virtuosité de toutes ces représentations est excessive, les surfaces des objets, les épidermes des choses sont exprimées avec un bonheur inouï. Il en est ainsi pour des rues, des devantures, des boutiques, des prairies, des plages, des marchés, détonnantes maisons illuminées, reflétées dans l'eau, des paysages délimités avec un art égal à l'art des maîtres japonais" (His brilliance knows no bounds, he expresses the surfaces of objects, the skin of things with incredible felicity. This can be seen in his streets, facades, shops, meadows, beaches, markets, amazing floodlit houses, reflected in the water, landscapes defined with a skill which equals that of the Japanese masters); *La Vie artistique*, vol. 2 (1893), p. 272. There was further praise for "ce grand artiste, qui fait honneur à Paris de sa présence" (this great artist who honors Paris with his presence) in the 1892 Champ de Mars Salon, *La Vie artistique*, vol. 2 (1893), pp. 295 and 322–25.

49 Duret contacted Antonin Proust (1832–1905), the Commissaire des Beaux-Arts at the Paris World Fair in 1889, to ask for his support for Whistler: see Théodore Duret to Whistler, July 29, 1889, GUL D191, GUW 00985.

50 Whistler to comtesse Greffulhe, November 30, 1889, GUL G221, GUW 01856.

51 Geffroy worked for Clemenceau's newspaper *La Justice* and also contributed to other leading papers such as *Le Journal*, *Le Figaro*, *Gil Blas* and *Le Gaulois*. Clemenceau wanted the picture to be acquired by the state and he was to take the minister for the arts to see it at Goupil's, according to Duret (Théodore Duret to Whistler, November 18, 1891, GUL D194, GUW 00988).

FIG. 6.3 *Arrangement in Grey and Black: Portrait of the Painter's Mother*, 1871, Musée d'Orsay, Paris, Photo: J. G. Berizzi, Réunion des Musées Nationaux/ Art Resource, NY; YMSM 103.



a masterpiece.<sup>52</sup> Roger Marx was also involved, dealing with the formalities at the ministry and keeping Duret posted about every move in letters which were then forwarded to Whistler.<sup>53</sup>

The *Mother* was duly acquired and destined for the collection of the Louvre, although during an artist's lifetime such acquisitions made by the French state were usually hung for a period in the Musée du Luxembourg — where the curator, Léonce Bénédict, welcomed the painting. Bénédict tells us that Whistler protested when the work was classified as that of a foreign artist, and so it was grouped with that of his French contemporaries.<sup>54</sup> It is hardly surprising that, heartened by such acclaim, Whistler decided, in 1892, to return to live in Paris among his French friends.

If a certain amount of emphasis has been put on the background detail of the lives of these normally faceless critics and contacts, it has been for the purpose of showing how support for Whistler in France intensified in the 1880s and 1890s. His principal supporters there — who created a substantial body of favorable criticism — were a very tightly knit group who knew each other socially

52 "One of the masters of contemporary painting and of painting of all time," "this work of sovereign beauty"; *La Justice* (July 1, 1891) and *Le Gaulois* (November 4, 1891), reprinted in *La Vie artistique*, vol. 2 (1893), pp. 73–85.

53 Cf. Théodore Duret to Whistler, November 27, 1891, GUL D195, GUW 00989; and Roger Marx to Théodore Duret, November 27, 1891, GUL M296, GUW 04025.

54 Dormont and MacDonald, p. 47.

or professionally.<sup>55</sup> By the end of his career Whistler's work was perceived by his adherents, the Whistler mafia, as an integral part of the great French tradition. Noting the influence he had both absorbed and exerted, Léonce Bénédicté summed up the status Whistler had achieved in France when he reviewed his work in the Paris Exposition Universelle of 1900. Whistler sent as one of his exhibits a distant echo and possibly a deliberate pendant to the *Symphony in White, No. 1: The White Girl* (see fig. 3.3), which had launched his career in France at the Salon des Refusés in 1863. The painting that he chose to round off his career there almost forty years later was from the same period: the *Symphony in White, No. 2: The Little White Girl* (see fig. 3.5). Bénédicté's comments on it in 1900 amount to the total adoption of Whistler into the network of his fervent supporters and into the history of French art: "C'est frais, c'est lumineux, d'un art tout français."<sup>56</sup>

55 Other reviewers gave way once Duret and Geffroy had given the lead: see Dormont and MacDonald, pp. 44 and 46, for hostile critics.

56 "It's fresh, it's luminous, and quite, quite French." *Gazette des Beaux-Arts* 24 (November 1900), p. 483.



# Whistler's Japanese Connections

Ayako Ono

James McNeill Whistler was profoundly inspired by Japanese art, and the Japanese influence on his art has been frequently mentioned in the context of his artistic development.<sup>1</sup> He derived inspiration from Japanese art in terms of composition, space, and harmony of color. What is less well known is that Whistler's art and aesthetic attitude were introduced to Japan and had a great impact there. The relationship between Whistler and Japan was, in fact, reciprocal, and this paper will trace Whistler's contact with Japan and chart when and how his life and work came to be known there.

*Bridge over River (After Whistler)* by Urushibara Mokuchu (fig. 7.1) shows a close compositional resemblance to two works by Whistler: *Nocturne: Blue and Gold — Old Battersea Bridge* (see fig. 4.13) and *Blue and Silver: Screen, with Old Battersea Bridge* (fig. 7.2), the screen now in the Hunterian Art Gallery. In these works, the nocturnal scene is executed with delicate tonalities in the water and sky, but with the structure of the bridge and the interstices of the wooden pier rendered more clearly. Many writers, including Whistler's contemporaries Theodore Child and Elizabeth R. and Joseph Pennell, have pointed out resonances between Whistler's Battersea Bridge paintings and *ukiyo-e* prints by Hiroshige.<sup>2</sup> The Pennells, for instance, noted, "Whistler never copied Japanese technique. But Japanese composition impressed him — the arrangement, the pattern, and at times detail. The high or low horizon, the line of a bridge over a river, the spray of foliage in the foreground, the golden curve of a falling rocket, the placing of a figure on the shore, the signature in the oblong panel, show how much he learned."<sup>3</sup> The main motif is close up to the picture surface and reveals a clear compositional resemblance to *Kyobashi Takegashi* (Kyobashi Bridge) by Hiroshige. In their turn, Japanese artists such as Urushibara were inspired by Whistler's works.

Little is known about Urushibara. He was born in Tokyo in 1888 and learned the technique of woodblock printing there. He went to Europe in 1908 and in 1910 to Britain, to work for the Japanese publisher Shinbi Shoin, where he stayed until 1940.

1 See, e.g., Robin Spencer, "Whistler and Japan: Work in Progress," in *Japonisme in Art: An International Symposium* (Tokyo, 1980), pp. 57–81; Toshio Watanabe, *High Victorian Japonisme* (Bern, 1991), pp. 211–46; Ayako Ono, *Japonisme in Britain: Whistler, Menpes, Henry, Hornel and Nineteenth-Century Japan* (London, 2003), pp. 41–86.

2 See Merrill, *Pot of Paint*, pp. 36–37 and p. 328 n. 15; Lochnan, *Etchings*, p. 179 and p. 298 n. 23; Theodore Child, "American Artist at the Paris Exhibition," *Harper's New Monthly Magazine* 79 (September 1889), p. 496.

3 Pennell, *Life*, vol. 2, p. 112.

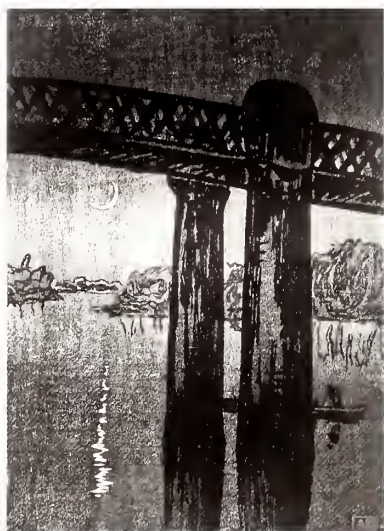


FIG. 7.1 Urushibara Mokuchu, *Bridge over River (After Whistler)*, ca. 1919, British Museum, London; ©Trustees of the British Museum.



FIG. 7.2 *Blue and Silver: Screen, with Old Battersea Bridge, 1872*, ©Hunterian Art Gallery, University of Glasgow; YMSM 139.

He demonstrated the method of making woodblock prints at the Japan-British Exhibition in 1910, and as an engraver he collaborated with Frank Brangwyn (1867–1956), making a series of prints of Brangwyn’s work. Whistler was already known in Japan by the time Urushibara came to Britain, and it is almost certain that Urushibara knew of Whistler’s art.

*Nocturne* (pl. 12), painted by Minami Kunzo in 1908, is another picture indicating Whistler’s influence on Japanese art. The deep tonality and silhouetted masts on the far shoreline show a close resemblance to Whistler’s *Nocturne: Grey and Silver — Chelsea Embankment, Winter* (fig. 7.3), and it is one of several nocturnal scenes by Minami that reference Whistler’s work. Soon after his arrival in London in 1907, Minami wrote in his diary that he had visited the place where Whistler used to live, confirming that Whistler was known in Japan by 1907.<sup>4</sup>

As early as 1887, Whistler’s name appeared in an article on *ukiyo-e* by Ernest Hart

4 Kumada Tsukasa, “Rondon no Seishun: Zengo Shirataki Ikunosuke, Minami Kunzo, Tomimoto Kenkichi wo Chushin-ni [Adolescence in London: Before and After — Shirataki Ikunosuke, Minami Kunzo, Tomimoto Kenkichi],” *Rondon no Seishun: Zengo Shirataki Ikunosuke, Minami Kunzo, Tomimoto Kenkichi to sono shūhen* [Adolescence in London: Before and After — Shirataki Ikunosuke, Minami Kunzo, Tomimoto Kenkichi and their circle] (Fukuyama Museum of Art, 1990), p. 6.

published in the art journal *Dai-Nihon Bijutsu Shimpo*.<sup>5</sup> Hart mentioned that Whistler concluded his *Ten O'Clock* lecture with the name of Hokusai, thus establishing a connection between Whistler and Japan. Hart did not, however, provide much information about Whistler himself. In 1890, Hayashi Tadamasa (1853–1906), an art dealer in Paris, gave a lecture in Tokyo that was transcribed in *Meiji Bijutsukai Houkoku* (Report of the Meiji Art Society). In a section on the “Definition of Art” he mentioned Whistler’s exhibitions “Notes”—“Harmonies”—“Nocturnes,” which had been held in London in 1884 and 1886. Hayashi said that Whistler’s works with musical titles surprised critics.<sup>6</sup>

Hayashi Tadamasa was an important behind-the-scenes figure in the art worlds of Europe and Japan. He was employed as a translator at the 1878 International Exhibition in Paris and went on to make a career as an art dealer. At the time of the 1878 exhibition, Hayashi worked for the Paris branch of the semi-official trading company Kiritsu/Kiryu Kôshô Kaisha. The company had been founded in 1874 and financed by the Japanese government to promote foreign trade for the development of industry and *bijutsu kougei* (Meiji-period export art) and to supply Japanese goods for industry and commerce. In 1882, Hayashi left Kiritsu/Kiryu Kôshô Kaisha and went into business for himself in 1884.

Through his professional activities, Hayashi actively introduced Japanese art to France and contributed to Japanese studies there. Because of his knowledge of Japanese art, he advised and sold works to collectors such as Louis Gonse, Edmond



FIG. 7.3 *Nocturne: Grey and Silver*—Chelsea Embankment, Winter, 1879, Freer Gallery of Art, Smithsonian Institution, Washington, D.C.: Gift of Charles Lang Freer; YMSM 205.

5 Ernest Hart, “Nihon Bijyutu no Setsu 10 [On Japanese Art, no. 10],” *Dai-Nihon Bijutsu Shimpo*, 1887; reprint, *Dai-Nihon Bijutsu Shimpo*, vol. 5 (Yumani Shobou, 1990), pp. 147–52.

6 Hayashi’s lecture was dated July 10, 1890. See the reprinted edition, *Meiji Bijutsukai Houkoku*, vol. 2 (Yumani Shobou, 1991), pp. 12–33.

de Goncourt, and Emile Guimet. Hayashi regularly attended the monthly dinner parties, *diner japonais*, started by Siegfried (Samuel) Bing, and he talked about Japanese art to the enthusiastic diners. The French academic painter Raphaël Collin (1850–1916) wrote that Whistler joined one of these dinner parties.<sup>7</sup> Whistler may well have met Hayashi there.

Hayashi also had extensive contacts in Britain and was instrumental in distributing Japanese objects there. Hayashi put his seal on the prints he sold, and in the Burrell Collection in Glasgow there is a print by Hokusai on which Hayashi's seal is pressed.<sup>8</sup> It is also known that Hayashi came to London and helped to organize the exhibition of Ernest Hart's collection of Japanese art, which was held in the library of the Society of Arts in 1886.<sup>9</sup> Hayashi also wrote a letter to introduce Whistler's follower Mortimer Menpes to Shinagawa Yajiro of the foreign ministry in Tokyo in 1887, on the occasion of Menpes's visit to Japan.<sup>10</sup>

The articles by Hart and Hayashi mentioned above provided fragments of information about Whistler to Japanese audiences. In 1903, Iwamura Toru, Japanese art critic and art historian, wrote a more detailed article on Whistler called "Rekitei Kanwa" that appeared in *Bijutsu Shimpō*, one of the most eminent Japanese art journals in the Meiji and Taisho periods. "Whistler is a well-known painter in the West," Iwamura explained. "There is nobody who does not know Whistler there." Although Whistler was known by Japanese artists, art historians, and art dealers who had the opportunity to visit European cities, Iwamura's article indicates that Whistler was not generally well known in Japan. Iwamura also pointed out the Japanese influence on Whistler's art, especially the influence of Hokusai and Hiroshige.<sup>11</sup> He continued to introduce Whistler to Japanese readers and art students, including Minami Kunzo. Iwamura was also greatly devoted to John Ruskin, and this may be the reason why his writing on Whistler often focused on his life rather than his works and techniques. It is unlikely that Iwamura met Whistler, but he knew the Pennells and visited their house in London around 1904.<sup>12</sup>

Iwamura was an enthusiastic art historian and bought books on the subject when

7 *Furansu Kaiga to Ukiyo-e. Tōzai Bunka no Kakehashi. Hayashi Tadamasa no Me* [French painting and ukiyo-e: The eye of Tadamasa Hayashi, a bridge between Eastern and Western cultures] (Takaoka City Museum of Art, 1996), p. 156.

8 Burrell Collection, Glasgow Museums, inv. no. 37/14.

9 "Japanese Exhibition," *Journal of the Society of Arts* 34 (April 30, 1886), p. 645. Hart lectured on "Japanese Art Work." See *ibid.*, pp. 1204–15, 1231–42, 1254–75.

10 Letter from Hayashi Tadamasa to Shinagawa Yajiro, dated Meiji 20 (1887), January 14, Paris; National Diet Library, Japan.

11 Ousai (Iwamura Toru), "Rekitei Kanwa 4," *Bijutsu Shimpō* 2, no.16 (1903), pp. 4–5.

12 Iwamura Toru, *Geienzakkou* (Tokyo, 1971), pp. 215–17.

he visited the United States and Europe. In his article on Whistler, for instance, Iwamura mentioned *Modern Painters* by George Moore as a source of information.<sup>13</sup> At his death, he left about 2000 books that are now in the collection of Asakura Choso Museum in Tokyo.<sup>14</sup> These include several books on Whistler, such as *The Life of James McNeill Whistler* (1908) by the Pennells, which is inscribed "Iwamura '08," and *Recollections and Impressions of James A. McNeill Whistler* (1903) by Arthur Jerome Eddy. In his article of 1903, Iwamura reproduced a bust of Whistler by Sir Joseph Edgar Boehm (now in the National Portrait Gallery in Washington, D.C.), as well as *La Princesse du pays de la porcelaine* (see pl. 4) and *Arrangement in Grey and Black: Portrait of the Painter's Mother* (see fig. 6.3). It is very difficult, however, to trace the actual sources of information for his 1903 article, since the particular books on Whistler that we know Iwamura owned were purchased after the article was written.

Kume Keiichiro (1866–1934), a Japanese *Yōga* (Western-style) painter who studied in Paris, wrote "Whistler versus Ruskin and the Origin of Impressionism" in 1904, and a series of articles on Whistler in the art journal *Kōfū* in 1906.<sup>15</sup> From these articles, it is almost certain that Kume had referred to Théodore Duret's *Histoire de J. McNeill Whistler et de son oeuvre*, which had been published in 1904. Some of the sentences have simply been translated from Duret's book, and most of the letters quoted in Kume's articles were letters from Henri Fantin-Latour that were quoted by Duret.

Kume described the paintings, including their colors and texture, and he may have seen actual works by Whistler such as *Symphony in White, No. 2: The Little White Girl* (see fig. 3.5). Also, his comments on Whistler's memorial exhibitions in London and Paris are interesting. He wrote, "Some of them, such as *La Princesse du pays de la porcelain*, *The Golden Screen*, *Lange Lijzen*, and *The Balcony* show Whistler's interest in Japan." Kume adds, "However, he does not care if those paintings seem Japanese or not. He simply enjoys the eccentricity of depicting these paintings."<sup>16</sup> Kume found a more profound influence of Japanese art in the series of nocturnes, writing that Whistler had found a new aspect of nature in Japanese art that was different from European landscape paintings, and this led him to create his most original nocturnal scenes.<sup>17</sup>

13 Ousai (Iwamura Toru), "Rekitei Kanwa 4," p. 4.

14 Mr. Murayama Mansuke of Asakura Choso Museum assisted with archival research at the museum.

15 "Whistler versus Ruskin and the Origin of Impressionism," *Seika* 2, no. 1 (December 1904); Kume Keiichiro, "Whistler's Biography 1," *Kōfū* 1 (1906), pp. 1–14; "Whistler's Biography 2," *Kōfū* 2 (1906), pp. 12–22; "Whistler's Biography 3," *Kōfū* 4 (1906), pp. 1–13.

16 Kume Keiichiro, "Whistler's Biography 2," pp. 14–15.

17 Ibid., p. 17.



FIG. 7.4 Shugio Hiromichi (1853–1927), 1904, courtesy of Shugio Ippei.



FIG. 7.5 Kaneko Kentaro (1853–1942), 1898, The Culture Research Institute Nihon University.

None of the Japanese art dealers, artists, and art critics mentioned so far actually met Whistler, with the possible exception of Hayashi Tadamasa, mentioned above. Two Japanese men who did were Shugio Hiromichi (1853–1927, fig. 7.4) and Kaneko Kentaro (1853–1942, fig. 7.5). Shugio Hiromichi is best known as the person who helped Frank Lloyd Wright to collect *ukiyo-e*. He was born in Saga in 1853, studied at Daigaku Nanko with Hayashi Tadamasa in 1870, and then studied in the United States from 1871 until 1874. In 1880, Shugio became a branch manager of Kiryu / Kiritsu Kôshô Kaisha in New York, and his contact with artistic circles in New York started around this period. He became a member of the Tile Club in 1880 and came to know Winslow Homer (1836–1911), William Merritt Chase (1846–1916), and Julian Alden Weir (1852–1919). In 1884 he became a member of the Grolier Club, a club for print collectors and connoisseurs, whose members included Charles Lang Freer, Louis Comfort Tiffany, and the collector Henry O. Havemeyer.<sup>18</sup>

In an interview with *Bijutsu Shimpo* in 1911, Shugio said that he had met Whistler with a group of other people. Unfortunately, he did not have a close

<sup>18</sup> Mr. Shugio Ippei provided this biographical information.

conversation with Whistler. He said that although Whistler was known as a sarcastic person, he was very kind to Shugio since the latter was a foreigner, and because Japanese art gave Whistler artistic inspiration. He added that all of his friends who knew Whistler respected the artist.<sup>19</sup> Whistler and Shugio's mutual friends included Howard Mansfield, Chase, Weir, and Freer.

Shugio purchased a copy of *The Etched Work of Whistler* by E. G. Kennedy, published by the Grolier Club, and brought it back to Japan. Some etchings, such as *The Little Putney, No. 1* (1879; K 179) and *Speke Hall, No. 1* (1870; K 96), were reproduced in Shugio's 1911 interview.<sup>20</sup> This may have been significant for the introduction of Whistler as an etcher in Japan, although his etchings did not become popular in that country until the 1930s.

Whistler's meeting with Kaneko Kentaro gives us more information. Kaneko was born in Fukuoka prefecture in 1853. He went to the United States with the Iwakura Missions in 1871 and stayed there until 1878. He studied law at Harvard University, where his classmates included Ernest Fenollosa and Theodore Roosevelt. Kaneko worked out the draft of the Imperial Constitution of the Meiji government in Japan with the prime minister, Ito Hirobumi, and he became a vice-minister of agriculture and commerce in 1896 and minister in 1900. The Ministry of Agriculture and Commerce dealt with international exhibitions at that time, and Kaneko gave a number of lectures in Japan, such as "Guidelines for the Paris International Exhibition."<sup>21</sup>

Kaneko traveled around the United States and Europe between July 1889 and June 1890 to explain the Imperial Constitution and also to learn about the parliamentary system in other countries. His *Oubei Giinseido Torishirabe Jyunkaiki* provides detailed information on his travels. According to Kaneko, he had contacts not only with politicians and jurists, but also with people in society.<sup>22</sup> When he met Dr. Herbert Spencer of Oxford University on March 2, 1890, Spencer told him that he would be recommended as an honorary member of the Athenaeum club. The Athenaeum has a record of his entry in the Honorary Rules 13 of the club.<sup>23</sup> Whistler was not a member of the club, and his name does not appear on the lists of visitors dining there. However, Kaneko said in his lecture that he met Whistler at the club

19 Koushusei, "Shugyo Hiromichi shi wo Tazunufu," *Bijutsu Shimpo* 10, no. 9 (1911), pp. 16–19.

20 Ibid.

21 Kaneko Kentaro, "Pari Bankoku Daihakurankai ni Taisuru Houshin," *Taiyo* 3, no. 3 (1897), pp. 209–16.

22 Kaneko Kentaro, *Oubei Giinseido Torishirabe Jyunkaiki* [*Record of a Tour for the Investigation of European and American Parliamentary Systems*], annotated by Obuchi Kazunori (Tokyo, 2001).

23 Register 1883–1902, the Athenaeum club, p. 42.

in London in 1890 and had a meal with him.<sup>24</sup> The Athenaeum is the only club of which Kaneko became a member, so it must have been the place where they met.<sup>25</sup>

Kaneko gave a lecture at the Tokyo School of Fine Arts in May 1897 at the request of Okakura Kakuzô, also known as Tenshin. Tenshin established the Tokyo School of Fine Arts with Ernest Fenollosa, who was a professor of philosophy at Tokyo Imperial University. It is not known why Tenshin asked Kaneko to give a lecture at the art school, but it probably had to do with Kaneko's position as vice-minister of agriculture and commerce, the ministry that dealt with the International Exhibition. Fenollosa was busy buying Japanese art just after his arrival in Japan, and it seems that he was buying fakes. When Kaneko found out about it, he showed Fenollosa genuine works of Japanese art from the collection of the Kuroda family, feudal lords of Fukuoka.<sup>26</sup> Fenollosa was Tenshin's teacher, so this might be why Tenshin asked Kaneko to give a lecture.

Kaneko's lecture was transcribed and published in *Kinko Zattetsu* in 1898. According to Kaneko, he had had a discussion on Japanese art with Whistler. During their discussion, Whistler was reported to have said, "It is the Japanese who give a kind of spiritualism to the mountains, rivers, grass, and trees."<sup>27</sup> He also said that "the Japanese gave it to all nature." This had something in common with his thoughts as an aesthete. In "The Red Rag" of 1878, Whistler said, "If the man who paints only the tree, or flower, or other surface he sees before him were an artist, the king of artists would be the photographer."<sup>28</sup> He also said in his *Ten O'Clock* lecture, "Nature contains the elements, in colour and form, of all pictures.... The artist is born to pick, and choose, and group with science, these elements, that the result may be beautiful."<sup>29</sup> According to Kaneko, Whistler also said it is unfortunate that the Japanese do not depict the human body as it is. They look less than human bodies. Whistler continued that there must be a historical reason for this and that he would like to learn it. Because there were no books he could read on the subject, he wondered if there was a Japanese artist who could possibly explain it.<sup>30</sup>

Significantly, Western civilization surged into Japan at the same time that the

24 Kaneko Kentaro, "Bijyutsu to Jisei tonon Kankei," transcribed in *Kinko Zattetsu* (1896), pp. 44–63.

25 Judging from *Oubei Gûnseido Torishirabe Jyunkaiki* (pp. 102–109), Kaneko met Whistler in London, sometime between March and April 1890. Whistler and Kaneko discussed Japanese art while having a meal at the Athenaeum club.

26 Kaneko Kentaro, "Nihon Bijyutsukai no Onjin Ko Fenorosa kun — Shishaku Kaneko Kentaro," *Taiyo* 14, no. 14 (1908), pp. 114–17.

27 See Kaneko, *Kinko Zattetsu*, pp. 58–59.

28 Whistler, *The Gentle Art*, p. 128.

29 Ibid., pp. 142–43.

30 Kaneko, *Kinko Zattetsu*, pp. 58–59.

West started to find inspiration in Japanese art. The opening of Japan was a process of major political, economic, and social change that took place rapidly after the arrival of Commodore Perry in 1853. Learning about Western art was a part of the modernization of Japan. Many artists started to learn about and to appreciate Western technique, and the Japanese government encouraged the study of Western art under its policy of “modernization.” Ernest Fenollosa deeply regretted this movement and started to promote the regeneration of Japanese art. Okakura Tenshin followed his lead and these two men made a great effort to establish the Tokyo School of Fine Arts. As part of this effort, Fenollosa and Tenshin promoted an appreciation of traditional art, and they also encouraged students to synthesize Japanese and Western art and to develop a new style of Japanese painting. As part of this effort, Hishida Shunso and Yokoyama Taikan, students of Okakura, started to experiment with space, atmosphere, and natural light in their paintings, and they founded a misty, hazy style of painting known as *môrôtai*. This was an attempt to bring Western techniques into Japanese-style painting. They de-emphasized the outlining that had been such an important formal element in traditional Japanese paintings.

In 1904 Okakura Tenshin was asked to come to Boston to catalogue the Japanese art collection of the Museum of Fine Arts. Taikan and Shunsho went to the United States with him and had exhibitions in the States and Europe in 1904 and 1905; their paintings were well received, even though *môrôtai* had been criticized and dismissed in Japan as far too Western.<sup>31</sup>

Taikan had experimented and developed this style before his visit to the United States, as is seen, for instance, in *Cole Leaves* (pl. 13). *Moonlight* (pl. 14), painted about 1905, shows the great development of his style during his stay in the United States. In this work, Taikan almost eliminated linear contours and concentrated instead on color combinations. A critic reviewing the exhibition in Boston stated, “There is a superb atmospheric effect, and the gray principle dominates, but the tonality is as choice and rich as it is sober.”<sup>32</sup>

There is no specific evidence of Whistler's direct influence on *môrôtai*. However, Okakura, Hishida, and Taikan knew Isabella Stewart Gardner, Howard Mansfield, and others who were acquainted with Whistler and owned his works. Also, they may have seen the Whistler Memorial Exhibition in Boston in 1904. In his later years, Taikan said that he felt “there were no borders between countries in works of art.

31 These exhibitions were held at the Century Association in New York (from April 12 to May 1) and in Boston (November 17–28) in 1904, and at the National Arts Club in New York (January 4–21), Fischer Art Gallery in Washington, D.C. (March 27 to beginning of April), and Henry Graves and Co. in London (July 10–August 6) in 1905. See Yokoyama Taikan, *Taikan Gadan* (Tokyo, 1999), pp. 165–67.

32 “Exhibition by Japanese artists in Cambridge,” *Boston Evening Transcript* (November 18, 1904).

Whistler's memorial exhibition was held just before our exhibition in London. There would be something in common between our *môrôtai* and Whistler's work."<sup>33</sup>

The Japanese influence on Whistler's art has been noted since Whistler's own time and continues to be part of the art-historical analysis. Yet Whistler's Japanese connections were not only transmitted from East to West. Japanese artists and writers also found in Whistler aesthetic inspiration for the creation of new and original forms of expression.

33 Taikan, *Taikan Gadan*, pp. 70–71.



PLATE 1 *Cartoon of Rich and Poor Peacocks*,  
detail, 1876, ©Hunterian Art Gallery, University  
of Glasgow; M.584.



PLATE 2 *The Lily*, 1870–72,  
Fine Arts Museums of San  
Francisco, Bequest of Whitney  
Warren Jr. in memory of  
Mrs. Adolph B. Spreckels,  
1988.10.31; M.364.

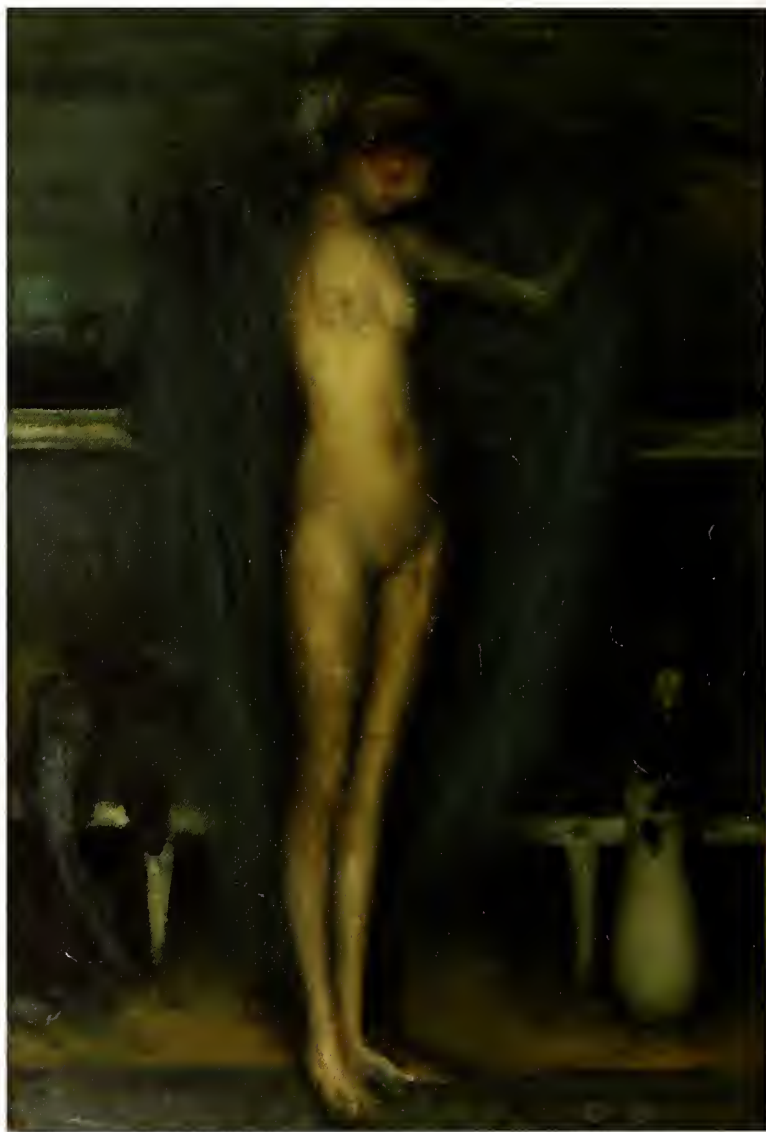


PLATE 3 *Harmony in Blue and Gold:*  
*The Little Blue Girl*, 1894–1903, Freer  
Gallery of Art, Smithsonian Institution,  
Washington, D.C.: Gift of Charles Lang  
Freer; YMSM 421.



PLATE 4 *Harmony in Blue and Gold: The Peacock Room*, northeast view showing *La Princesse du pays de la porcelaine* and shutters, 1876/77, Freer Gallery of Art, Smithsonian Institution, Washington, D.C.: Gift of Charles Lang Freer; YMSM 178.

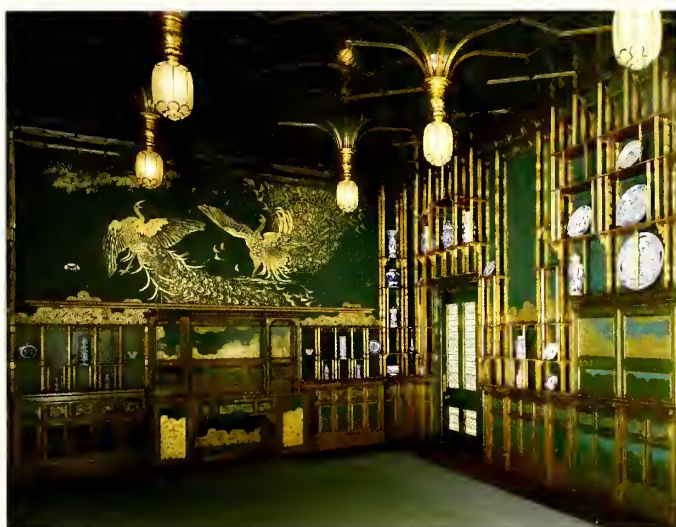


PLATE 5 *Harmony in Blue and Gold: The Peacock Room*, southwest view including peacock mural, 1876/77, Freer Gallery of Art, Smithsonian Institution, Washington, D.C.: Gift of Charles Lang Freer; YMSM 178.



PLATE 6 Claude  
Monet, *Morning on  
the Seine near Giverny*,  
1897, Bequest of  
Julia W. Emmons,  
1956, Metropolitan  
Museum of Art, New  
York; ©Metropolitan  
Museum of Art/Art  
Resource, NY.



PLATE 7 Claude  
Monet, *Morning on  
the Seine near Giverny*,  
1897, Museum of  
Fine Arts, Boston.



PLATE 8 Claude Monet, *Charing Cross Bridge, Overcast Day*, 1900, Museum of Fine Arts, Boston.

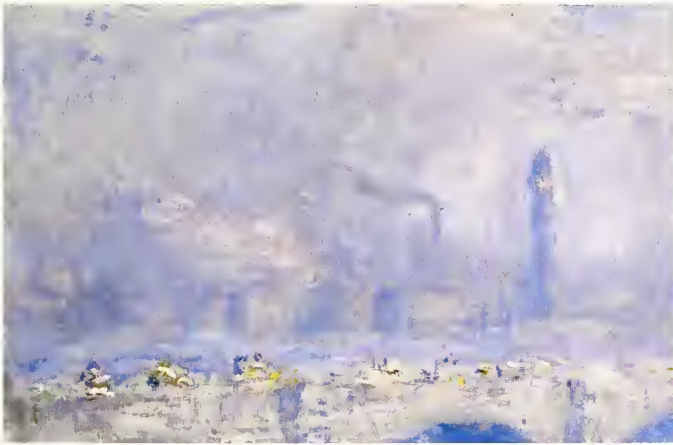


PLATE 9 Claude Monet, *Waterloo Bridge, Sunlight Effect*, 1903, Mr. and Mrs. Martin A. Ryerson Collection, The Art Institute of Chicago; Photography ©The Art Institute of Chicago.



PLATE 10 Claude Monet, *Palazzo Contarini*, 1908, Kunstmuseum, St. Gallen,  
Acquired through the Ernst Schürpf-Foundation.

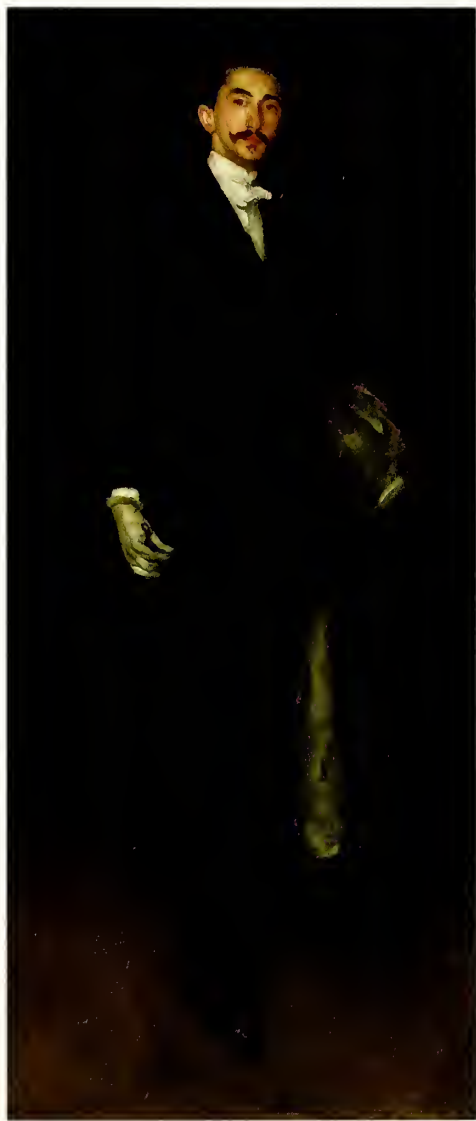


PLATE 11 *Arrangement in Black and Gold: Comte Robert de Montesquiou-Fezensac*, 1891–94, ©Frick Collection, New York; YMSM 398.

PLATE 12 Minami  
Kunzo, *Nocturne*,  
ca. 1908, The University  
Art Museum, Tokyo  
National University of  
Fine Arts and Music.



PLATE 13 Yokoyama  
Taikan, *Cole Leaves*,  
1900, private collection;  
from *Yokoyama Taikan*,  
vol. 1, Dai Nippon Kaiga,  
1979, p. 75.

PLATE 14 Yokoyama Taikan, *Moonlight*, ca. 1905, private collection; from *Yokoyama Taikan*, sequel vol. 1, Dai Nippon Kaiga, 1993, p. 57.



PLATE 15 *Note in Yellow and Gold*: Mrs. Gardner, 1886, Isabella Stewart Gardner Museum, Boston; M.1116.



PLATE 16 *The Violet Note*, 1886, Isabella Stewart  
Gardner Museum, Boston; M.1081.



PLATE 17 *Blue and Orange: The Sweet Shop*, 1886,  
Isabella Stewart Gardner Museum, Boston; YMSM 263.



PLATE 18 *Harmony in Blue and Silver: Trouville*, 1865,  
Isabella Stewart Gardner Museum, Boston; YMSM 64.

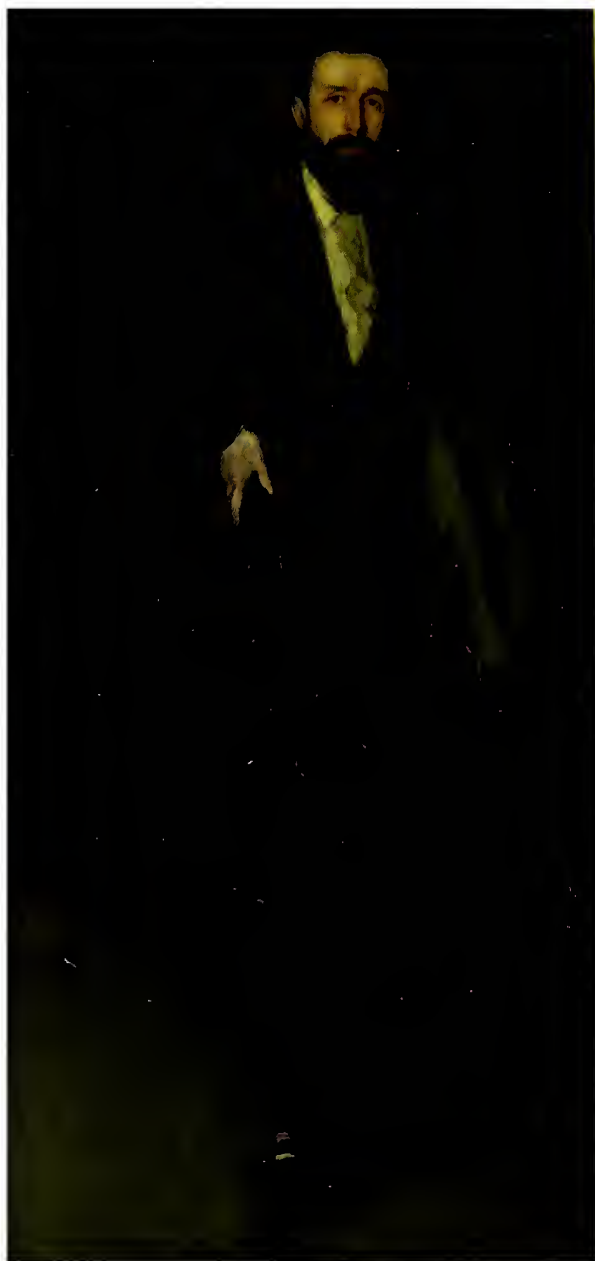


PLATE 19 *Arrangement  
in Black: Portrait of  
F. R. Leyland,*  
1870–73, Freer Gallery  
of Art, Smithsonian  
Institution, Washington,  
D.C.: Gift of Charles  
Lang Freer; YMSM 104.

# Whistler and German Histories of Modern Painting: Another Case of *Art and Art Critics*

Grischka Petri

The story of Whistler and Germany is a story of forgetting. In the 1860s and 1870s, Whistler ordered wines from a wine merchant in Mainz, Siegfried Ladenburg, for a total of half a pot of paint in Ruskinian currency.<sup>1</sup> Ladenburg's shop no longer exists but the invoice he sent to Whistler survives: on the list is a sparkling Riesling from the first-class location "Scharzhofberg" and other wines of superior quality. Whistler never paid for these golden liquids. Perhaps he forgot. More certain is that Germany forgot about Whistler. In 1980 the German art historian Klaus Berger thought it was "curious that the acknowledged avant-garde artist today is so forgotten and unknown."<sup>2</sup>

Whistler was not always ignored by the German art world, however, and this essay offers an explanation for the long-lasting art-historical amnesia. It focuses on Whistler's important contribution to the Munich International Art Exhibition of 1888; and on Richard Muther (1860–1909), art critic and leading German art historian of the 1890s, who had an important role to play in the efforts to establish Whistler as a modern artist in Germany. Muther also helped to shape a neo-idealistic interpretation of Whistler, which made him famous there. And lastly, we have to look at the figure of Julius Meier-Graefe (1867–1935), another art critic, and what he did effectively to delete Whistler from the German art-historical canon. It is another story of *Art and Art Critics*, this time without Whistler's participation and without pamphlets, but with a lot of heavy German volumes on modern art.

Whistler entered the German exhibition scene on a major scale in 1888. Two years earlier, he had sent two pictures to the Jubiläums-Ausstellung (Jubilee Exhibition) in Berlin, celebrating the centenary of the Königliche Akademie der Künste (Royal Academy of Arts). Whistler was disappointed not to receive a gold medal for his *Arrangement in Grey and Black, No. 2: Portrait of Thomas Carlyle* (see fig. 10.2),

1 The unsettled account with S. Ladenburg runs up to a total of £114.15.0; see invoice, October 9, 1876, PWC, GUW 08934. For *Nocturne in Black and Gold: The Falling Rocket* (fig. 2.1), which Ruskin described as a pot of paint flung in the public's face, Whistler had asked £210.

2 "Merkwürdig, daß der als Avantgardist anerkannte Künstler heute so weit vergessen und unbekannt ist...." Klaus Berger, *Japonismus in der westlichen Malerei 1860–1920* (Munich, 1980), p. 39.



FIG. 8.1 Munich Glaspalast (Crystal Palace), ca. 1890, site of the 1888 International Art Exhibition; from Volker Hütsch, *Der Münchner Glaspalast 1854–1931: Geschichte und Bedeutung*, Munich, 1980, p. 74.

and the Nationalgalerie in Berlin did not buy it for its collection as he had wished.<sup>3</sup> Perhaps this disappointment was another reason for him to prefer Munich to Berlin two years later, when he again wanted to send some paintings to a German exhibition. His friend at the British Embassy, James Rennell Rodd, persuaded Whistler to exhibit in Munich at the Third International Art Exhibition, explaining, “Munich is much more important artistically than Berlin, in fact whereas Berlin is a city of politics and finance, Munich is entirely consecrated to the Muses. They are very anxious to get a good English room, and there are lots of gold medals going about.”<sup>4</sup> Indeed, Berlin was only on its way to becoming a major city of the arts. Munich was by far the more fashionable place to show paintings, as everyone in the Bavarian capital was eager to stress.<sup>5</sup>

3 Anderson and Koval (p. 288) state that Whistler “in the end had sent nothing,” but this does not seem to be correct; see Whistler to Henry Graves, [March 14/20, 1886], Houghton Library, Harvard University, Cambridge, MA, G UW 10920, expressing hopes that the Carlyle portrait might be purchased for “their Museum.” This could only be a reference to the Nationalgalerie, opened in 1876, although it is unlikely that Whistler had any precise conception of the Berlin museum landscape. After the exhibition, he blamed Helen Lenoir (1852–1913), later Mrs. D’Oily Carte, for not arranging the award of a gold medal; see Helen Lenoir to Whistler, October 21, 1886, GUL D136, G UW 00930. In any case, Whistler’s paintings were not included in the catalogue of the 1886 exhibition.

4 James R. Rodd to Whistler, January 12, 1888, GUL R107, G UW 05207. The catalogues of all the Munich International Art Exhibitions between 1869 and 1931 are digitized and can be consulted at <http://www.arthistoricum.net/ressourcen/glaspalastkataloge/>.

5 See Richard Muther, “Die internationale Kunstausstellung: II. Die Historienmalerei,” *Münchener Neueste Nachrichten* (June 7, 1888), pp. 1–2 (at p. 1), writing that Berlin is not the place for artists to prosper. On Munich as Germany’s city of the arts in the later nineteenth century, see Frank Büttner, “Die Akademie und das Renommee Münchens als Kunststadt,” *Zeitenblicke* 5 (2006), <http://www.zeitenblicke.de/2006/2/Buettner>.

As Margaret MacDonald and Joy Newton have noted, Whistler was in search of a European reputation, so it was understandable that he concentrated on the Munich International Art Exhibition, which had more than three thousand works on display (fig. 8.1).<sup>6</sup> Whistler considered the event important. The seventy works he sent to Munich was a large number by any standard: apart from his one-man shows, it was the second largest display of his work in his lifetime, outnumbered only by the exhibition at Georges Petit's galleries in Paris the previous year.<sup>7</sup> Furthermore, most of the works in the English section were sent by galleries or collectors, not by artists, who, according to a Munich newspaper, did not care to exhibit there.<sup>8</sup> Whistler was an exception — he did care. He had sent his works, as he wrote in a letter, “on condition that what I considered a representative assertion of my work, should in its entirety be be [sic] perfectly hung.”<sup>9</sup> This was also the reason why he did not exhibit in the American, but in the English section — more space was available, and the works could be better hung.<sup>10</sup> Whistler sent oils, watercolors, pastels, and etchings, trying to present the full range of his artistic modes of expression and his mastery of different media to the German public and also to the prize jury.

During the exhibition, a series of fourteen articles by the young art historian Richard Muther were prominently placed on the first pages of the daily newspaper *Münchener Neueste Nachrichten*, giving an impression of the art represented. Muther had closely followed the organization of the show and described it section by section. In his first article, he presented the exhibition as one of historical significance, the milestone for the profound changes that German art, in particular the art of Munich, had undergone during the previous years. Art, according to Muther, had passed beyond the stage of mere imitation, history painting, and historicizing genre, had left the brownish finish of the Düsseldorf School behind, and had turned toward the visualization of the modern soul (*moderne Seele*). It was that kind of “New Art” (*neue Kunst*) that was now on display in the Glaspalast. Among the important exhibits was not one, according to Muther, that had anything in common with art from the 1870s — either technically or thematically. Muther praised

6 Joy Newton and Margaret F. MacDonald, “Whistler: Search for a European Reputation,” *Zeitschrift für Kunstgeschichte* 41 (1978), pp. 148–59.

7 In 1887 Petit had exhibited fifty works — oils, watercolors, and pastels — by Whistler. In Munich a year later, forty works in these media were on display, plus thirty etchings that have not been identified but included some from Venice.

8 Richard Muther, “Die internationale Kunstausstellung: X. Die Engländer,” *Münchener Neueste Nachrichten* (July 28, 1888), pp. 1–2 (at p. 1).

9 Whistler to Robert Koehler, April 11, 1888, Manuscripts Division, 213 Andersen Library, University of Minnesota, St. Paul, G UW 09178.

10 See Robert Koehler to Whistler, May 28, 1888, GUL M475, G UW 04205.

pleinairism and modern subjects, the industrial worker in particular, and the fact that religious painting had become less dogmatic and turned to more universal and humane themes with a psychological interest. Modern landscape painting to him was — after disappointing years of merely juxtaposing its elements — a felicitous synthesis of figures, animals in the landscape, and nature.<sup>11</sup> Although celebrating modern painting, Muther contended that every artist who had found his personal style — even if it were not so modern — should stay true to it.<sup>12</sup> Thus, for Muther, even history painting could take on subjective value.

Muther's view of the exhibition as a thoroughly modern one was, perhaps, exaggerated, and should be understood as a sign of an emerging symbolist interpretation of art, then called "neo-idealistic" in Germany, which in a way was more modern than the pictures themselves.<sup>13</sup> This subjective approach to art criticism emphasized the inner qualities of a work of art, and within a short time, Whistler would become the subject of these neo-idealistic interpretations, not only in France but also in Germany.

Muther wrote specifically about Whistler's paintings at the Munich exhibition in *Die Engländer*, part ten of his series. To him, the English section was "in spite of its eccentric painters perhaps the most interesting one," and Whistler was introduced as "eccentric and quirky to the extreme and yet by God's grace an artist."<sup>14</sup> The "wonderful" Venice etchings were mentioned, along with Whistler's watercolors, which Muther described as genius-like improvisations (*geniale Improptus*), despite being unfinished works of art. According to Muther, Whistler's artistic intentions were revealed by the titles of his pictures, which created a poetry of colors: "That man [Whistler] is always working, but almost never on commission, he is as poor as a church mouse and asks horrendous prices of the few who want themselves painted as an arrangement of colors. Incidentally he has exerted considerable influence on French art through his painterly snapshots, street scenes and the like."<sup>15</sup>

11 Richard Muther, "Die internationale Kunstausstellung: I. Gesamtbild," *Münchener Neueste Nachrichten* (June 2, 1888), p. 1.

12 Muther, "Die internationale Kunstausstellung: II. Die Historienmalerei."

13 The portraits by Franz von Lenbach (1836–1904), whose works had been given a room of their own at the exhibition, are a case in point. Lenbach was not a modernist, but as Germany's most celebrated portrait painter was very contemporary. Muther praised the psychological qualities of Lenbach's work; see Richard Muther, "Die internationale Kunstausstellung: V. Lenbach," *Münchener Neueste Nachrichten* (June 27, 1888), p. 1. Works by the more overtly Symbolist painters Boecklin and Klinger, "the *enfant terrible* of the exhibition," could also be seen in Munich; see Richard Muther, "Die internationale Kunstausstellung: VI. Mythologisch-allegorische Darstellungen," *Münchener Neueste Nachrichten* (July 3, 1888), pp. 1–2 (at p. 1). At the same time, artists from the avant-garde Belgian exhibition society Les XX were missing.

14 Muther, "Die internationale Kunstausstellung: X. Die Engländer," p. 1. This and following quotations from German texts are the author's translations, unless noted.

15 Muther, "Die internationale Kunstausstellung: X. Die Engländer," p. 2.

In the political climate of rivalry between France and Germany after the war of 1870/71, every opportunity was used to belittle the French contribution to modern art. Even so, in his article on the French section, Muther felt obliged to explain that the organizers of the show had attached great significance to the French contributions: although France was the hereditary enemy of Germany, she had been her teacher in art more than once.<sup>16</sup> This political background was one reason that German art critics looked out for modern art elsewhere. For those like Muther, who had to write against a backdrop of anti-French sentiment, Whistler's cosmopolitan identity was an advantage: he enjoyed a solid reputation in France but was based in London. Whistler was able to deliver what was good about French art, particularly its modernity, without being French. Younger critics such as Muther and Emil Heilbut thought him a genius, while conservative critics such as Friedrich Pecht, adhering to a kind of national realism, wrote that one could make up everything in a Whistler watercolor or pastel, because there was almost nothing to see.<sup>17</sup> Obviously, Whistler had made an impression. When, in 1892, the *Münchener Neueste Nachrichten* remembered past international art exhibitions, its critic Fritz v. Ostini mentioned Whistler's unforgotten "original experiments in color," and in his 1903 obituary, Hans Rosenhagen recalled that the artist had become well known in Germany through the Munich exhibition of 1888.<sup>18</sup>

Indeed, it was with that very exhibition and its critical reception by Muther that Whistler made his entry into German art history. In 1893 Muther, by then professor of art history in Breslau, published his three-volume *Geschichte der Malerei im XIX. Jahrhundert* (History of Modern Painting).<sup>19</sup> An English edition was published only three years later.<sup>20</sup> While preparing the book for publication, Muther had asked Whistler to provide him with some photographs of his paintings.<sup>21</sup> In the book,

16 Muther, "Die internationale Kunstausstellung: XIV. Frankreich," *Münchener Neueste Nachrichten* (August 31, 1888), p. 1.

17 Fr[iedrich] Pecht, "Die Münchener Ausstellungen von 1888. [Part 8]," *Die Kunst für alle* 3 (1887/88), pp. 371–79 (at p. 379). Reviewing the Jubilee Exhibition in Berlin two years earlier, he had written that English artists are "highly interesting, if they describe English nature and English custom to us, and become only unbearable when they go beyond"; Fr[iedrich] Pecht, "Die Berliner Jubiläums-Ausstellung [Part 7]," *Die Kunst für alle* 1 (1885/86), pp. 342–51 (at p. 346). On Pecht, see Kenworth Moffett, *Meier-Graefe as Art Critic* (Munich, 1973), p. 42. On Heilbut's views on Whistler, see Sabine Schlenker, *Mit dem "Talent der Augen": Der Kunstkritiker Emil Heilbut (1861–1921) — Ein Streiter für die moderne Kunst im Deutschen Kaiserreich* (Weimar, 2007), pp. 216–21.

18 Fritz v. Ostini, "Die VI. Große Internationale im Glaspalaste," *Münchener Neueste Nachrichten* (June 2, 1892, Vorabend-Blatt), pp. 1–3 (at p. 2); Hans Rosenhagen, "James McNeill Whistler," *Die Kunst für alle* 18 (1902/03), pp. 533–34 (at p. 534).

19 Richard Muther, *Geschichte der Malerei im XIX. Jahrhundert*, 3 vols. (Munich, 1893).

20 Richard Muther, *The History of Modern Painting*, 3 vols. (London, 1896). A "revised edition continued by the author to the end of the XIX century" was published in four volumes in 1907.

21 Richard Muther to Whistler, September 5, 1892, GUL M497, GUW 04227.



FIG. 8.2 *Arrangement in Black: La Dame au brodequin jaune* — Portrait of Lady Archibald Campbell, 1882–84, Philadelphia Museum of Art; W. P. Wiltach Collection; YMSM 242.

Muther introduces Whistler, “the creator of a New Idealism of color,” by returning to his works at the Munich International Art Exhibition of 1888. He starts with a eulogy of the portrait of Lady Archibald Campbell (fig. 8.2), concluding, “It was a great work of art, the work of a master, a work of James McNeill Whistler.”<sup>22</sup> Muther goes on with a romantic interpretation of the *Nocturne: Black and Gold — The Fire Wheel* (1872–77, Tate Britain, London; YMSM 169), also shown at the Munich exhibition, and then turns to the artist’s biography.<sup>23</sup> The main works mentioned or reproduced are the three symphonies in white (see fig. 3.3 and fig 3.5) and the portraits of Carlyle and Whistler’s mother (see fig. 6.3). Muther described how Whistler made a total aesthetic experience through the decorative arrangement of his exhibitions and also how he had departed from Victorian narrative conventions, alluding briefly to *Whistler v. Ruskin* in this context.<sup>24</sup> He sharply distinguished the public persona of the artist from the artist in his studio,

working “like a hermit in his secluded house.” Muther then evoked a poetic Whistlerian mood, characterizing Whistler as monarch of a distant kingdom of mysterious landscapes and women.<sup>25</sup>

In the next paragraph, Muther cited the influences on Whistler’s “exquisite and entirely personal style”: D. G. Rossetti, the Impressionists, Japanese prints,

22 Muther, *History*, vol. 3, pp. 645–46 (*Geschichte*, vol. 3, p. 522).

23 Muther, *History*, vol. 3, pp. 646–47 (*Geschichte*, vol. 3, pp. 522–24).

24 Muther, *History*, vol. 3, p. 651 (*Geschichte*, vol. 3, pp. 524–25).

25 Muther, *History*, vol. 3, p. 652 (*Geschichte*, vol. 3, pp. 525–26).

and Velázquez.<sup>26</sup> He contrasts Whistler's "delicate, tender, monotonous" colors to Ruskinian and Pre-Raphaelite realism and explains Whistler's method — to pick and choose from the elements of nature to form a harmony — by quoting the *Ten O'Clock* lecture.<sup>27</sup> According to Muther, even Whistler's portraits are not "uncannily doubles of nature" but "dreamy visions passing before one's fancy."<sup>28</sup> The criticism eventually becomes as poetic and "dreamy" as the works themselves:

*There is style in all [Whistler's] work, and it is all simple, earnest, and grandiose.... There is produced in his works an effect in the highest sense decorative, and at the same time mysterious. Divested of everything paltry or material, his figures seem like phantoms. They have lost their shadows: shadows indeed themselves, they live in a delicate ashen-grey milieu; they are almost immaterial, as if set free from the weight of the body; they hover between earth and heaven, like a breath that has been compressed and will soon dissolve once more as swiftly as it took shape. They remind the spectator of what is told of spiritualistic séances.*<sup>29</sup>

Hans Rosenhagen in 1903 offered an explanation for these phantasmagorical reactions toward Whistler's works, which, while not inevitable, were the prevailing attitude in German criticism. He noted that "the artist, by not saying and showing everything, most vividly arouses the fantasy of the beholder."<sup>30</sup>

Indeed, Muther illustrates this observation very well. Whistler's atmospheric surfaces certainly moved him and triggered his imagination. He perceived Whistler's portraits and landscapes as mystic emanations of color, hinting at a spiritual sphere both transcending and defying the physical presence of their respective subjects. In his text, Muther continued to evoke works of either genre, like the portraits of the artist's mother — "an enigmatical and almost mystical effect"; of Carlyle — "it is a wintry London day, at the hour of gathering dusk, when life fades..."; and of Sarasate (fig. 8.3) — "in the dark atmosphere his expressive hands acquire a sensitive, phantom-like animation. His figure looks as though it were floating into another world."<sup>31</sup> Similarly, he described Whistler's nocturnes as being painted with "soft blue light flooding the sonorous silence of the world like a breath beyond the grave."<sup>32</sup> In his understanding, color and mood went together: "the bodily presence of nature is merely the necessary condition of a mood.... The ... highest summit of

26 Muther, *History*, vol. 3, pp. 653–54 (*Geschichte*, vol. 3, p. 526).

27 Muther, *History*, vol. 3, pp. 655–56 (*Geschichte*, vol. 3, pp. 527–28).

28 Muther, *History*, vol. 3, p. 656 (*Geschichte*, vol. 3, p. 528).

29 Muther, *History*, vol. 3, pp. 657–58 (*Geschichte*, vol. 3, p. 529).

30 Rosenhagen, "James McNeill Whistler," p. 534.

31 Muther, *History*, vol. 3, pp. 658–59 (*Geschichte*, vol. 3, pp. 530–31).

32 Muther, *History*, vol. 3, pp. 660–61 (*Geschichte*, vol. 3, p. 533).

this art will be reached, as he [Whistler] believes, when there is a public which will make no demand for definite subjects, but be content with tones and harmonious combinations of color.”<sup>33</sup> Muther was not so content himself, however: his insight into the abstract qualities of Whistler’s landscapes and portraits did not stop him from seeing romantic subjects in the nocturnes’ pure harmonies of color, or phantoms in arrangements in black.

Similarly, in discussing Whistler’s etchings Muther emphasized that the medium “permits the artist to create a dreamy world of sentiment, light, and poetry far more readily than painting”; only then does he provide concrete information about the different “sets” and draw the usual comparison with Rembrandt.<sup>34</sup> Muther closes with an art-historical assessment of Whistler: “As regards modern art, Whistler is painter par excellence,” and “the ultimate consummation” of the artistic efforts to liberate color from drawing. In Muther’s developmental chronology, Constable painted chromatic suggestions, Corot introduced “the purely poetic conception of the values of light,” the Impressionists entirely broke with “the mere draughtsman’s conception of objects” and color, and Whistler emancipated these colors from nature. “His pictures . . . are purely pictorial.”<sup>35</sup>

In Richard Muther’s views about Whistler two main lines become discernible. One concerns Whistler’s pictorial qualities — his dematerialization of subject and his emphasis on color harmonies. For Muther, Whistler’s tendency toward abstraction leaves plenty of room for the imagination of the beholder, preparing the way for Symbolism, the modern art of the day. In Germany, Symbolism was also labeled neo-idealism or “Gedankenmalerei,” meaning the painting of ideas. Oswald Sickert wrote of Whistler’s “appeal to the imagination . . . under the name of poetry.”<sup>36</sup> In his *History of Modern Painting*, Muther had placed Whistler in this context, as his “dreamy” passages have made clear.

Muther’s criticism fits into a broader trend, evident in the 1890s, which required the “modern” art critic to evoke poetically the mood of the works about which he wrote. To us, this lavish manner of writing seems exaggerated, but at the end of the nineteenth century it was fashionable and appealing — less dry than the usual heavyweight art-historical tomes for which German scholars are notorious to the present day. Indeed, with his *History of Modern Painting*, Muther became one of the most popular art critics in Germany.

33 Muther, *History*, vol. 3, pp. 659–60 (*Geschichte*, vol. 3, p. 532).

34 Muther, *History*, vol. 3, p. 661 (*Geschichte*, vol. 3, pp. 534–35).

35 Muther, *History*, vol. 3, p. 663 (*Geschichte*, vol. 3, p. 536). The revised edition of 1907 did not contain this passage.

36 Oswald Sickert, “Whistler,” *Kunst und Künstler* 1 (1903), pp. 464–68 (at p. 467).

His view of Whistler as a modern master of painting and of spiritualized vision was shared — in all its ambivalence — by many others.<sup>37</sup> A telling example is an 1894 article by Heilbut (using his pen name Herman Helferich), who explains why Whistler is a Symbolist: “He extracts certain colors from the world and gives preference to them. And there is something dreaming, musing, unworldly, and insofar something antagonistic to the world in the expression of his pictures.” On the other hand, “his works are so entirely pictorial” that they can be hung side by side with the old masters.<sup>38</sup> Georg Gronau called Whistler’s portraits the “best-painted of our century.”<sup>39</sup> This duality in Whistler’s works constituted the quality that made him a master in the eyes of those defining modern art in the German 1890s: they were at once highly subjective and part of an art-historical evolution. By the end of the decade, however, it was that very ambivalence within and toward Whistler’s works that would prompt Julius Meier-Graefe to question his historical relevance.

Meier-Graefe had his first encounter with modern art through Edvard Munch, whom he met in Berlin in 1892. At the Black Pig café (*Zum schwarzen Ferkel*), a Bohemian coterie of aesthetes dedicated to the ideas of Ibsen, Nietzsche, and



FIG. 8.3 *Arrangement in Black: Portrait of Señor Pablo de Sarasate*, 1884, Carnegie Museum of Art, Pittsburgh; YMSM 315.

37 The neo-idealistic or Symbolist interpretation of Whistler’s art was probably more literary than the artist himself would have agreed with in earlier years, but the mastery attributed to him was more important and put any other aesthetic concerns in the shade.

38 Herman Helferich [Emil Heilbut], “Etwas über die symbolistische Bewegung,” *Die Kunst für alle* 10 (1894/95), pp. 33–37 (at p. 35). The term “malerisch” is not fully translatable, but means “pictorial” and also “painterly” or “artistic.” “Pictorial” is used in this all-encompassing sense in the present paper.

39 Georg Gronau, “Englische Porträts,” *Die Kunst für alle* 15 (1899/1900), pp. 147–54 (at p. 152).

Strindberg (who was part of the group) exchanged views on art. Munch would become a role model to Meier-Graefe, a model who would inform his later views on artists' personalities. Meier-Graefe was deeply impressed by Munch, particularly by his depiction of inner worlds revealing conflicts and alienation, and he thought the Norwegian painter a tragic hero of modern times.<sup>40</sup>

In 1895 Meier-Graefe moved to Paris, and began to travel across Europe in order to study art from a transnational perspective. On trips to England in 1894 and 1899, as well as in Paris, he saw some late Whistlers.<sup>41</sup> During these years he developed a method of critical evaluation based on the visual qualities of a work of art, rejecting the prevailing neo-idealism of German art critics.<sup>42</sup> Even so, it was one of Meier-Graefe's idiosyncrasies to link his interest in formalism with a demand for humanity as a key part of artistic genius. Thus in his critical judgments he introduced a moral component when it came to evaluating artistic personalities.<sup>43</sup>

This element becomes clear in his 1899 essay "The position of Edouard Manet," published in *Die Kunst für alle*, a German art magazine. Although the essay's title indicated an exclusive interest in Manet, Meier-Graefe also devoted considerable space to Whistler. These artists were considered to be at the two poles of modern painting, with Whistler credited with bringing Japanese and Spanish influences into modern art.<sup>44</sup> Inspired by Velázquez, Whistler is

*the only portraitist of our times who succeeds in giving his works that ultimate consummation [äußerste Vollendung] far from any banality, in concentrating his marvellous abilities so that nothing remains unresolved. His art is to balance a whole world on the tip of his fingernail so that an absolute balance is in control of every aspect. In front of a perfect Whistlerian work one is seized by the nervous obsession to detect somewhere a weakness, a slip.*<sup>45</sup>

40 See Moffett, *Meier Graefe as Art Critic*, pp. 9–10.

41 He recalls the Grafton Galleries' exhibitions on *Fair Women* (1894) and *Fair Children* (1895), and that *Harmony in Grey and Green: Miss Cicely Alexander* (1872, Tate Britain, London; YMSM 129) was shown at the latter. Julius Meier-Graefe, "Whistler," *Die Zukunft* 44 (1903), pp. 286–88 (at p. 287).

42 See Moffett, *Meier Graefe as Art Critic*, p. 24; Jensen, p. 247 ("nascent formalism").

43 See Catherine Krahmer, "Meier-Graefes Weg zur Kunst," *Hofmannsthal Jahrbuch zur europäischen Moderne* 4 (1996), pp. 169–226 (at pp. 187–90), and P[aul] G[eorge] Konody, "A German Thinker on Modern Art," *The Connoisseur* 23 (1909), pp. 119–21 (at p. 120).

44 Julius Meier-Graefe, "Die Stellung Eduard [sic] Manet's," *Die Kunst für alle* 15 (1899/1900), pp. 58–64 (at pp. 59, 64). For more recent comparative evaluations of Whistler and Manet, see Robin Spencer, "Whistler, Manet, and the Tradition of the Avant-Garde," in Ruth E. Fine, ed., *James McNeill Whistler: A Reexamination* (Washington, D.C., 1987), pp. 47–64; Hubert Locher, "Whistler und Manet: Aktualisierung eines Vergleichs auf den Spuren Julius Meier-Graefes," *Zeitschrift für Kunstgeschichte* 66 (2003), pp. 237–60. Michael Fried, *Manet's Modernism: or, The Face of Painting in the 1860s* (Chicago, 1996) also discusses several of Whistler's paintings and etchings in relation to Manet's "Generation of 1863."

45 Meier-Graefe, "Die Stellung Eduard [sic] Manet's," p. 60.

Meier-Graefe soon succumbed to this obsession, stating that Whistler never reached the level of his idol, Velázquez; Manet, in contrast to Whistler, luckily stayed at a distance from the Spanish master. The comparison of Manet and Whistler was not Meier-Graefe's invention. As Robin Spencer has noted, the German artist Otto Scholderer had written of Whistler's nocturnes to Henri Fantin-Latour in 1873: "I find them better each day. The finesse of his colour, above all, his touch charms me; it is as fresh as Manet's and finer, more gourmand, I can say. Still, Manet has a freshness in his subjects that Whistler does not know."<sup>46</sup>

Meier-Graefe used his article on Manet to introduce his comparative method, writing that an art critic has a duty not only to distinguish various currents of art, but also to draw the line clearly between real achievements and mere efforts:

*And therefore it is not only allowed to place Manet higher than Whistler, but our entire aesthetic, which is based upon such differences of value, provokes clear distinction. Of course Whistler already loses out in a comparison because of personal things that inadvertently and wrongfully interfere with contemplation. His sluggish ways of working are less sympathetic than Manet's.*<sup>47</sup>

Meier-Graefe nevertheless conceded that "only the result counts. But let us put a good Whistler beside a good Manet; e.g., the magnificent portrait of Paganini beside Manet's Toreador. Simple greatness in both, only one probably thinks that Whistler appears great because he has attained simplicity through fabulous means, whereas Manet appears simple, because he is great."<sup>48</sup> (The "Paganini" was Whistler's portrait of Pablo de Sarasate. Manet's "Toreador" is probably *A Matador, or The Saluting Matador* (fig. 8.4).) Meier-Graefe used his comparative method to distinguish between better and lesser art, concluding that Manet was more independent and therefore stronger than Whistler.<sup>49</sup>

In Meier-Graefe's obituary of Whistler, he admired the brilliant synthesis of French, Japanese, Spanish, and English influences as an individual, and even

46 "Je les trouve de jour en jour mieux. La finesse de sa couleur, surtout de sa touche est charmante pour moi; c'est aussi frais que Manet et plus fin, plus gourmand je peux dire; cependant Manet a une fraîcheur dans son sujet que Whistler ne connaît pas." Otto Scholderer to Henri Fantin-Latour, January 25, 1873 (Paris, Brame & Lorenceau), quoted in Spencer, "Whistler, Manet, and the Tradition of the Avant-Garde," pp. 56–57, transl. n. 42.

47 Meier-Graefe, "Die Stellung Eduard [sic] Manet's," p. 63.

48 Ibid., pp. 63–64.

49 Meier-Graefe, "Die Stellung Eduard [sic] Manet's," p. 64. Of course the conclusion depends on the definition of independence. O. Golwin, "Amerikanische Malerei," *Die Kunst für alle* 16 (1900/1), pp. 273–82 (at p. 274), wrote: "No European (see even Manet!) would have been able to bring over the uttermost subtleties of Velázquez as uninhibitedly as Whistler has done." On the occasion of the 1901 exhibition of the International Society of Sculptors, Painters and Gravers, Meier-Graefe mentioned Whistler's smaller works very favorably, in particular the pastels. Whistler's pictures were "masterworks of unseen perfection"; Julius Meier-Graefe, "Eine Whistler-Ausstellung," *Die Zukunft* 37 (1901), pp. 396–408 (at pp. 396–97).



FIG. 8.4 Edouard Manet, *A Matador, or The Saluting Matador*, 1865–67, H. O. Havemeyer Collection, Bequest of Mrs. H. O. Havemeyer, 1929 (20.100.52), Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York; ©The Metropolitan Museum of Art/Art Resource, NY.



FIG. 8.5 Edouard Manet, *Portrait of Théodore Duret*, 1868, Musée du Petit Palais, Paris, Photo: Erich Lessing/Art Resource, NY.

perfect, achievement. This perfection, however, prevented any further evolution — it was a dead end, and this assessment later led Meier-Graefe to write Whistler out of art history. That Whistler's art was seen as “purely individual,” defying any national schools, became — almost — an art-critical truism in Germany.<sup>50</sup> Facing this highly individual art, Scholderer had already expressed his skepticism when he confessed that he liked Manet “much more” than Whistler, because he did “not know where Whistler's painting will end up.”<sup>51</sup> As a

50 See Robert Kochler, “Die Entwicklung der schönen Künste in den Vereinigten Staaten von Nord-Amerika,” *Die Kunst für alle* 8 (1892/93), pp. 225–33, 241–46, 257–59 (at p. 245). E[rnst] W[ilhelm] Bredt, “James A. Mc Neill Whistler,” *Die Kunst für alle* 20 (1904/5), pp. 10–15 (p. 15): “Whistler ... was wholly American” and the starting point of American art history. Kochler seems to have been one of the first German critics to describe Whistler as an American artist instead of an English one.

51 “Mais j'aime ce dernier [Manet] bien plus, je ne sais pas où est la fin de la peinture de Whistler.” Otto Scholderer to Henri Fantin-Latour, 26 November 1872 (Paris, Brame & Lorenceau), quoted in Spencer, “Whistler, Manet, and the Tradition of the Avant-Garde,” p. 56, transl. n. 39.

singular phenomenon, Whistler not only denied the tradition of art (or was incapable of painting himself into it), but also was unable to spur future artistic evolutions. In England, Walter Sickert later wrote that “Whistler’s genius has been purely personal; he has had no following, and left no pupils.”<sup>52</sup>

In Germany, Meier-Graefe’s voice would become perhaps the most important one for the history of modern art in the twentieth century. His three-volume *Entwicklungsgeschichte der modernen Kunst* (The Evolution of Modern Art) was published in 1904, and in it he extended his comparative approach. The title alludes to Darwinian or Spencerian theories, and indeed the comparisons drawn in the book serve the purpose of explaining which kind of art was better or stronger than the other.<sup>53</sup> Muther’s *History of Modern Painting* had already presented an evolutionary model of artistic development,<sup>54</sup> but Meier-Graefe pushed it to the forefront of his analysis.

The book contained a chapter on Manet and Whistler, based on the article Meier-Graefe had written five years earlier. Now he summed up the comparison by stating that Manet appeared to be a thorough genius, Whistler a mere “artist” (between quotation marks, to contrast art and life); Manet possessed soul and life, Whistler presented only a masterly surface, an arrangement.<sup>55</sup> The comparisons go on. Manet reveals the Spanish element; Whistler hides it.<sup>56</sup> Whistler is a representative of the noblest eclecticism of our times rather than an example of true originality.<sup>57</sup> Manet shows his human subjects as they are, true to life, naked; Whistler dresses them up to compose his artificial arrangements, which are only great when every aspect of his character is working together in highest fulfilment. As an example of this kind of masterpiece Meier-Graefe singles out Whistler’s portrait of Théodore Duret, *Arrangement en couleur chair et noir* (see fig. 6.1), comparing it with Manet’s small portrait of the same sitter (fig. 8.5), which is inelegant, less meticulously finished, but “a masterpiece in front of which the Whistler is fading away.... The art of Manet’s brushwork is not empty delusion.”<sup>58</sup> Whistler “is lacking the convincing,

52 W. Sickert, “Charles Hazelwood Shannon,” *The Speaker* (April 24, 1897), in Anna Gruetzner Robins, ed., *Walter Sickert: The Complete Writings on Art* (Oxford, 2002), pp. 160–63 (at p. 161); cf. W. Sickert, “Impressionism,” *The New Age* (June 30, 1910), in Robins, pp. 252–55 (at p. 253): “But fatherless as he [Whistler] came into the world, so he left it childless, while the Impressionists have peopled a universe with their art.”

53 See Jensen (pp. 238–39) on what he calls Meier-Graefe’s “signature device — the elevation of one artist’s reputation at the expense of another”; see also Leopold D. Ettlinger, “Julius Meier-Graefe: An Embattled German Critic,” *Burlington Magazine* 117 (1975), pp. 672–74 (at p. 672); Locher, “Whistler und Manet,” p. 238.

54 Jensen, p. 218.

55 Julius Meier-Graefe, *Die Entwicklungsgeschichte der modernen Kunst: Ein Beitrag zur modernen Ästhetik*, 3 vols. (Stuttgart, 1904), vol. 1, p. 156.

56 Ibid., p. 156.

57 Ibid., p. 157.

58 Ibid., pp. 158–59.

wholly internal organic character of every strong art.” His art, Meier-Graefe suggests, is superficial and forgotten, even before the eye leaves the picture.<sup>59</sup>

While the main argument in Meier-Graefe’s book was taken from his article, its impact now was greater, since it was situated within a magisterial study of the history of art. Meier-Graefe had stated that if art history had to choose between Manet and Whistler, it would be better to forget about Whistler. By transforming his earlier article — a piece of art criticism — into a part of a larger art-historical teleology, Meier-Graefe went beyond exploring art history to shaping it.

Harry Kessler, an influential German critic, disagreed with Meier-Graefe. He thought that the image of Whistler as an egocentric personality had possibly cast shadows into Meier-Graefe’s book. He tried to explain that this image was the consequence of Whistler’s unfortunate submission of minor works to the Salon and the Berlin Secession, and of mistaking the mannerisms of “the Scots” — i.e., the Glasgow Boys — for affectations of the master.<sup>60</sup> He dismissed Meier-Graefe’s view of Whistler as a weak personality and a derivative artist; on the contrary, Kessler wrote, everything Whistler adopted, he transformed into something new.<sup>61</sup> Kessler introduced Gustave Courbet as another point of reference, stating that Courbet’s role in the development of modern art had been underestimated.<sup>62</sup> He traced Whistler’s tonalities back to Courbet and described them as a matter-of-fact pictorial principle underlying the nocturnes.<sup>63</sup> In them, Whistler had created London as a black flower, “yet nothing is sentimental.... Anyhow, Whistler never exaggerates.”<sup>64</sup> Kessler’s article does not include a single anecdote, and it does not drift off into “dream poetry.” Meier-Graefe enjoyed Kessler’s article on Whistler very much, as he told him in a letter: Kessler “presented the contrary opinion in a manner that is extremely tempting,” but even so, Meier-Graefe did not alter his own assessment.<sup>65</sup>

59 Ibid., pp. 159–60. This is a strange echo of Oscar Wilde’s remark in “The Grosvenor Gallery,” *The Dublin University Magazine* 90 (July 1877), p. 124, on *Nocturne in Black and Gold: The Falling Rocket* and *Nocturne: Blue and Gold — Old Battersea Bridge*, both exhibited at the Grosvenor Gallery in 1877, that they were “certainly worth looking at for about as long as one looks at a real rocket, that is, for somewhat less than a quarter of a minute.”

60 Harry Graf Kessler, “Whistler,” *Kunst und Künstler* 3 (1905), pp. 445–66 (p. 445). Whistler was very influential for the late nineteenth-century group of Scottish painters dubbed the Glasgow Boys, and the link was part of their public image.

61 Ibid., p. 446.

62 “Aber Manet ist im Grunde nichts als Courbet mit spanischem Wein und Pariser ‘esprit’ versetzt” (But Manet is basically nothing else but Courbet mixed with Spanish wine and Parisian ‘esprit’); *ibid.*, p. 451.

63 Ibid., pp. 452–53, 458.

64 Ibid., p. 460.

65 Julius Meier-Graefe to Harry Graf Kessler, May 1, 1907, in Catherine Krahmer, ed., *Julius Meier-Graefe: Kunst ist nicht für Kunstgeschichte da. Briefe und Dokumente* (Göttingen, 2001), pp. 49–50.

William Heinemann published Meier-Graefe's *Entwicklungsgeschichte der modernen Kunst* in an English translation in two volumes in 1908, as *Modern Art: Being a Contribution to a New System of Aesthetics*.<sup>66</sup> This edition differed from the original in many instances, beginning with its title, from which the biological term "evolution" was omitted. The chapter on Whistler was taken from an altogether different book Meier-Graefe had recently completed: *Die großen Engländer* (The Great Englishmen).<sup>67</sup> That book contained chapters on Wilson and Gainsborough, Turner, Constable, and Whistler, who surely would have objected to being identified as English.<sup>68</sup> In his last chapter, Meier-Graefe acknowledged Whistler's cosmopolitanism and under several subheadings presented not only "Whistler the Englishman," but also "the Frenchman," "the Japanese," and "the Spaniard," before concluding that he was an American after all.<sup>69</sup> Again Whistler was presented as a mirror of influences: "Everything that happened in Europe towards the middle of the nineteenth century had its echo in him."<sup>70</sup>

A closer look at the text of *Modern Art* reveals that the harsher parts of Meier-Graefe's criticism were omitted in the English translation — sometimes more than two entire pages have been left out.<sup>71</sup> It remains unclear whether Meier-Graefe, George W. Chrystal (one of the translators), or William Heinemann, as Whistler's friend and publisher, was responsible for these changes.<sup>72</sup> As these alterations or omissions are significant, it is proper to speak of two different texts. The original German text will be considered here.<sup>73</sup>

Meier-Graefe introduces Whistler from the very beginning as a paradoxical figure, simultaneously resisting and embracing Pre-Raphaelitism: "ein verkappter Präraffaelit," a Pre-Raphaelite in disguise.<sup>74</sup> While Whistler was the only artist who attempted to further develop the English tradition, Meier-Graefe believed this was

66 See Grischka Petri, "The English Edition of Julius Meier-Graefe's *Entwicklungsgeschichte der modernen Kunst*," *Visual Culture in Britain* 6, no. 2 (2005), pp. 171–88.

67 Julius Meier-Graefe, *Die großen Engländer* (Munich, 1908).

68 The chapter on Whistler in *Die großen Engländer* again contained passages taken from the *Entwicklungsgeschichte* but was on the whole rewritten.

69 Meier-Graefe, *Die großen Engländer*, p. 172 (*Modern Art*, vol. 2, p. 224).

70 Meier-Graefe, *Die großen Engländer*, p. 128 (*Modern Art*, vol. 2, p. 199).

71 For example, Meier-Graefe, *Die großen Engländer*, pp. 150–52.

72 See Petri, "The English Edition of Julius Meier-Graefe," pp. 173–75; on Heinemann and Whistler see Patricia de Montfort, "Whistler and Heinemann: Adventures in Publishing in the 1890s," *The Whistler Review* 2 (2003), pp. 64–73.

73 The text of the English translation follows wherever appropriate; otherwise my own translation is given.

74 Meier-Graefe's "ein verkappter Präraffaelit" in *Die großen Engländer* (p. 128) was erroneously translated as "an unfrocked Pre-Raphaelite" in *Modern Art* (vol. 2, p. 199), and has ever since been so quoted.

a dead end.<sup>75</sup> Key works in Meier-Graefe's analysis are *At the Piano* (see fig. 4.8) and the portraits of Thomas Carlyle and the painter's mother. He presents *At the Piano* as the starting point of two roads: one leading to England and the "white girls," the other leading to France, illustrated in works such as *The Coast of Brittany* (1861, Wadsworth Athenaeum, Hartford, Conn.; YMSM 37). Whistler's forked road, according to Meier-Graefe, had "no more in common than a Rossetti and a Courbet," and he implies that Whistler consciously chose to abandon a strong, organic mode in favor of a more decorative and superficial one.<sup>76</sup>

He linked the fork in the road between Courbet and Rossetti to *Symphony in White, No. 1: The White Girl* (see fig. 3.3), which possessed a modern (French) arrangement but an unmodern and insufficient conception. The passage devoted to this work deserves to be quoted in full (with those parts translated from the original German text in italics), because in its pictorial fury it contains much of what troubled Meier-Graefe about Whistler:

*The "Symphony in White" of the "Fille Blanche" scorns any, even the most primitive harmony. The hair's greasy brown colour gives the lie to the complexion meant to be vaporous, the blue eyes are inserted instead of painted, and the white on white of the figure and the background, a pure, or rather quite impure decorative effect of the most brutal sort, does not rank much higher than the Miss Grant by Herkomer of blessed memory and other imitations of the kind. The whole tendency to give a spiritual appearance without any spiritual essence, the ghostly by means of a trap-door, is Rossettian. The artist simply asserts what he had to demonstrate, reproduces his mystery instead of creating it and making it effectual. Look, how curious! says Whistler and disappears with a slight bow behind the blue-eyed white lady. It is the trick of a juggler at a fair. But we do not attach much significance to such a delusion, unless we were in that very psychological state of mind where everything, even a transfer-picture or the sounds of a barrel organ, or the sequel of a murder mystery story, lures us to shed tears of emotion. [W]e do not want to see the artist behind his white lady, but in her: we want to know how she works, how the puppet comes to life, how she moves and lives, and if there is a mystery we like to have it explained without turning off [English edition: so much wear and tear of] our senses. But the apparatus [i.e., Whistler's painting] is unequal to these demands. It remains merely glass eyes, false hair, clothes, carpet and curtains. The more energetically we contemplate it, the more cruelly is the illusion unveiled, and we recognise the affinity of the puppet to those works which demand of the spectator the inspiration which failed the artist. There are no spirits,*

75 Meier-Graefe, *Die großen Engländer*, p. 128 (*Modern Art*, vol. 2, p. 199).

76 Meier-Graefe, *Die großen Engländer*, p. 130 (*Modern Art*, vol. 2, pp. 200–201).

and all the coquetry with apparitions of a more or less ghostly kind can only tempt an old maid. [N]othing happens of itself least of all in art, which knows nothing of the arbitrary and accidental.<sup>77</sup>

This passage reveals Meier-Graefe's disavowal of subjective spirituality and mystery, and he used Whistler as a reference point to attack the spirit-evoking Symbolist art critics: "There are no spirits." The question of the spiritual content of a picture had been of central concern to the neo-idealistic art critics like Richard Muther, who by now had become Meier-Graefe's adversaries.<sup>78</sup>

While Meier-Graefe had based much of his *Entwicklungsgeschichte* on comparisons of formal qualities, the neo-idealists clung to content, particularly admiring the poetical and dreamy. It is possible that Meier-Graefe had difficulties in assessing Whistler according to his own visual criteria because the artist was a key figure in the neo-idealist world he was fighting. Everything that to the previous generation of art critics had been a reason to praise Whistler was, in Meier-Graefe's eyes, a reason to condemn him. Suggestiveness to Meier-Graefe meant only lack of inspiration. Artful color harmony was mere artificiality, turning the human figure into a clever apparatus or a dead painting. Whistler's gesture of aesthetic refinement was proof of a lack of authenticity. In contrast to the white symphonies, *The Coast of Brittany* was, despite being "a very bad, a very amateurish work ... nearer to art than all the phrases of the Pre-Raphaelites."<sup>79</sup>

It was exactly these Pre-Raphaelite phrases that had fascinated the Symbolist artists and their critics, not only in Germany but also in France. Much of Muther's estimation of Whistler was drawn from J.-K. Huysmans's chapter on "Wisthler" (*sic*) in *Certains*, published in 1889, and the writings of Gustave Geffroy.<sup>80</sup> Meier-Graefe frontally attacked this entire school of art criticism in his assessment of Whistler's nocturnes.<sup>81</sup> In the original German text, Meier-Graefe declared Whistler's musical titles to be an affectation designed to make his art more interesting.<sup>82</sup>

77 Meier-Graefe, *Die großen Engländer*, p. 132. The italicized passages are omitted in *Modern Art*, vol. 2, p. 201. Sir Hubert von Herkomer (1849–1914) had shown his portrait of *Miss Katherine Grant (Lady in White)* (1885, private collection) at the Munich International Art Exhibition of 1888. Muther had praised the work; Muther, "Die internationale Kunstausstellung: X. Die Engländer," p. 1.

78 See Jensen, p. 237.

79 Meier-Graefe, *Die großen Engländer*, p. 137 (*Modern Art*, vol. 2, p. 204).

80 See J[oris]-K[arl] Huysmans, *Certains* (Paris, 1889), pp. 67–72; for a comparison of Muther and Geffroy, see John Siewert, *Whistler's Nocturnes and the Aesthetic Subject*, Ph.D. diss., University of Michigan, 1994, pp. 202–204.

81 Meier-Graefe, *Die großen Engländer*, p. 144 (*Modern Art*, p. 209) explicitly mentions Camille Mauclair, *De Watteau à Whistler* (Paris, 1905, p. 310), "c'est l'ombre en soi-même"; and Léonce Bénédict, "Whistler", *Gazette des Beaux-Arts* 34 (1905), p.152, "Apparences! illusions! c'est la grande chimère et la grande poésie de la nuit elle-même."

82 Meier-Graefe, *Die großen Engländer*, p. 146: "Das Mäntelchen tat seine Wirkung."

Whistler's "atmosphere," he maintained, was "a wonderland of infinite opportunities. One learned to read in the air, and on real picture puzzles the critics wrote poetry of substantial content. One composed as he composed."<sup>83</sup>

In Whistler, Meier-Graefe missed the "autocratic power of a coherent system, which alone secures for the work of art independence from time."<sup>84</sup> He distinguished between the Impressionists' lack of finish and Whistler's incompleteness, warning against confounding the Impressionists' succinct forms and Whistler's more trivial use of color. Whistler, Meier-Graefe claimed, left too much room for the spiritual in art, or rather for the fantasies of art critics and the public, and he reproached Whistler for having "set aside the obstacles necessary to all ideal effort."<sup>85</sup>

The chapter continues with passages taken from the original German first edition of the *Entwicklungsgeschichte*, comparing the Spanish influence on Manet and Whistler.<sup>86</sup> It ends with an art-historical assessment — again abridged in the English edition: "Perhaps in Whistler we have not at all to deal with a painter.... Setting the painter aside, there is still enough over, though what remains is a very different figure from that hitherto presented by European art history. No painter of spiritual conditions and *other invisible jests*."<sup>87</sup> Meier-Graefe also tells us which role Whistler would have to play within a rewritten art history — "an industrial artist of delicate taste, a stimulating influence, which we may turn to good account, *a select collector*. He has left us things, which reflect his nature exactly; and as this was intensely modern the reflection becomes almost a symbol."<sup>88</sup>

Ten years earlier Meier-Graefe had enthusiastically welcomed a decorative art expanding beyond the picture frame.<sup>89</sup> This would have been a movement to write Whistler into, but even then, Meier-Graefe had emphasized that a painting as work of art and decoration were two different things, and that a good painter had to separate the independent and intrinsic laws of painting from those of modern decorative art.<sup>90</sup> Meier-Graefe never abandoned this idea, and in *Die großen Engländer* it becomes clear that, for him, a mixture of poetical and decorative art was

83 Meier-Graefe, *Die großen Engländer*, p. 146, not translated in *Modern Art*.

84 Meier-Graefe, *Die großen Engländer*, p. 167, not translated in *Modern Art*.

85 Meier-Graefe, *Die großen Engländer*, pp. 167–68, not translated in *Modern Art*; and *Die großen Engländer*, p. 153 (*Modern Art*, vol. 2, p. 214).

86 Meier-Graefe, *Die großen Engländer*, pp. 168–70 (*Modern Art*, vol. 2, p. 222–24).

87 Meier-Graefe, *Die großen Engländer*, p. 171 (*Modern Art*, vol. 2, p. 224). The "other invisible jests" are mistranslated as "the like."

88 Meier-Graefe, *Die großen Engländer*, p. 171 (*Modern Art*, vol. 2, p. 224). Italicized passage not included in the English edition.

89 Julius Meier-Graefe, "Beiträge zu einer modernen Ästhetik. [Part 1]," *Die Insel* 1/1 (1899), pp. 67–68.

90 *Ibid.*, p. 76.

neither true nor modern, and Whistler represented this unfortunate amalgamation. To Meier-Graefe, England's contribution to modern art mainly consisted in modern design and decorative arts.<sup>91</sup> But while Whistler's works might have been considered appealing in terms of interior decoration, "we do not have to take him as an industrial artist and collector but as an artist. In this way he dished himself up for us, in this way he tried to appear and was accepted by the elite."<sup>92</sup>

The last paragraph of the German text, again not included in the English edition, is a lament over Whistler's influence in Germany. Several of his works were exhibited in the exhibitions of the Berlin Secession.<sup>93</sup> Partly mediated by the Glasgow Boys' success at the Munich Secession, Whistler's refined arrangements became artistic prototypes.<sup>94</sup> Meier-Graefe commented ironically: "The Teutonic bear received a proper hairstyle and learned how to sit down well-manneredly.... The whole world was beautifully cut out, adopted a stylish attitude and a slightly dreamy touch.... Where would it have been more welcome than in the land of dreamers?"<sup>95</sup> Meier-Graefe wanted to wake them up and make them look at art, not dream up poems in front of it.

After Meier-Graefe's outburst in *Die großen Engländer*, some art critics wrote in defense of Whistler. But even in their articles, one senses the underlying influence of Meier-Graefe's *Entwicklungsgeschichte*, especially evident in the proliferation of the term "evolution" and in the reiteration of aspects of Meier-Graefe's argument.<sup>96</sup> Other critics accepted Meier-Graefe's anti-neo-idealist argument and distanced both themselves and Whistler from the old spirits: Werner Weisbach, for example, explained in 1911 that Whistler did not paint for the sake of any spiritual content, but only for the sake of visual appearance.<sup>97</sup> In the same year Richard Oertel insisted that purely pictorial problems were more important to Whistler than psychological ones, and that a strong artist's personality stood behind his subtle arrangements of

91 See Petri, "The English Edition of Julius Meier-Graefe," pp. 181–83.

92 Meier-Graefe, *Die großen Engländer*, p. 171, not translated in *Modern Art*.

93 In 1900, *Arrangement in White and Black* (ca. 1876, Freer Gallery of Art, Washington, D.C.; YMSM 185) was shown; in 1902, an unidentified nocturne; and in 1904, *Arrangement en couleur chair et noir: Portrait of Théodore Duret*.

94 Other critics mention Whistler's influence in Germany; see O. Sickert, "Whistler," p. 467; Richard Oertel, "Whistler," *Vellhagen und Klasings Monatshefte* 3 (1910/11), pp. 345–61 (at p. 352); see also Anderson and Koval, p. 328.

95 Meier-Graefe, *Die großen Engländer*, p. 173, not translated in *Modern Art*.

96 See, e.g., Albert Dreyfus, "James Abbott Mac Neill Whistler," *Die Kunst für alle* 22 (1906/7), pp. 201–16 (at p. 201).

97 Werner Weisbach, *Impressionismus: Ein Problem der Malerei in der Antike und Neuzeit*, 2 vols. (Berlin, 1911), vol. 2, p. 184. Overall, Weisbach's chapter on Whistler in his book is much more factual than any other. Having read the Pennells' biography, he was much better informed than most of the other German authors of articles on Whistler.

color.<sup>98</sup> Yet he also tried to rescue the “dreamy” poetical reaction, reminding his readers of Whistler’s intense “power of suggestion” and repeating the claim that Whistler had painted night as a form of visual poetry: “We feel the enigmatically deep poetry enveloping these pictures.” In a last effort to reconcile modernism and neo-idealistic poetry, Oertel wrote that Whistler was a “poet who unified his dreams and color-fantasies with the spirit of a thoroughly modern man.”<sup>99</sup>

But Whistler’s modernism could not be redeemed, at least not for Meier-Graefe. He wrote: “Since Monet and Manet, painting has changed. Certain things that are still possible in Munich are no longer tolerated in Europe.”<sup>100</sup> Weisbach could already sum up the recent steps in the evolution of modern art by observing the victory of French pleinairism — and the disappearance of Whistler from European galleries.<sup>101</sup> Indeed, Whistler’s few oil paintings in German collections had been sold by the 1920s.<sup>102</sup>

Meier-Graefe’s answer to his critics was to erase Whistler from the history of modern art, which he accomplished in the second edition of his *Entwicklungsgeschichte*, published in 1914/15 (and never translated into English).<sup>103</sup> In this text, Whistler was part of the errors of his generation, and an error that had to be “corrected.” In a letter to Richard Dehmel from 1919, Meier-Graefe stated that the first edition was “full of praise” for Whistler, while this “clown [Popanz] of modern painting is not mentioned at all in the second edition.”<sup>104</sup> This is only half true: the first edition had not been full of praise for Whistler, but he appears in the second edition only in sporadic depreciating remarks that mainly repeat Meier-Graefe’s well-established views. For instance, in a chapter on David, the critic notes how great the influence of fashion was on the French master and dares to predict that

98 Oertel, “Whistler,” pp. 346, 350, 353. This may also have been aimed at Max Nordau’s article on Whistler, “Zur Psychologie Whistlers” (On Whistler’s psychology), in which he claimed Whistler was a hyperaesthetic; Max Nordau, *Von Kunst und Künstlern* (Leipzig, [1905]), pp. 126–34. But Oertel’s main target was very likely Meier-Graefe himself. It is interesting to note that Oertel began his article on Whistler with an assessment of the Whistler art market in the artist’s own time and circa 1910. Meier-Graefe had opened his article on Manet of 1899 in a parallel way: see Meier-Graefe, “Die Stellung Eduard [sic] Manet’s,” p. 58.

99 Oertel, “Whistler,” pp. 354, 360.

100 Julius Meier-Graefe, *Der moderne Impressionismus* (Berlin, 1902), p. 4.

101 Weisbach, *Impressionismus*, vol. 2, p. 202.

102 *Nocturne: Grey and Gold — Chelsea Snow* (1876, Fogg Art Museum, Harvard University, Cambridge, Mass.; YMSM 174), was sold by the Kunsthalle, Hamburg, after 1922 under Gustav Pauli. *Arrangement in White and Black* (ca. 1876, Freer Gallery of Art, Washington, D.C.; YMSM 185) was sold by Max Linde, Lübeck, in 1904.

103 Julius Meier-Graefe, *Entwicklungsgeschichte der modernen Kunst*, 2nd ed., vol. 1 (Munich, 1914); vol. 2 (1915); vol. 3 (1924).

104 Julius Meier-Graefe to Richard Dehmel, November 6, 1919, in Krahmer, *Julius Meier-Graefe*, pp. 143–45 (at p. 144). This is reminiscent of Ruskin calling Whistler a coxcomb in the notorious article in *Fors Clavigera*, Letter 79, July 1877, in E. T. Cook and Alexander Wedderburn, eds., *The Complete Works of John Ruskin*, 39 vols. (London, 1903–12), vol. 29, pp. 146–69 (at p. 160).

“in a hundred years, when we will be a fashion, one will rhapsodise over paintings by Whistler, who side by side with David is a foppish bungler”; in volume two, he notes that Whistler fell victim without resistance to the overt exoticism of Japan, while Manet understood the aesthetic behind the surface appeal; Meier-Graefe also attacks Monet’s London paintings of Waterloo Bridge and Westminster, reproaching him for indifference and a foggy lack of structure and noting, “One has seen before that sort of painting with poorer features. Whistler painted likewise, only thinner and more Japanese, cheaper.”<sup>105</sup>

The main result of the second edition of the *Entwicklungsgeschichte der modernen Kunst* was that Whistler was virtually written out of German art history, although Meier-Graefe would mention him one more time. On the occasion of Whistler’s centennial birthday, Meier-Graefe wrote a short article for the *Frankfurter Zeitung*, which was peppered with impertinent anecdotes and acid barbs aimed at Whistler’s superficial and commercial egomania.<sup>106</sup>

In Meier-Graefe’s *Entwicklungsgeschichte der modernen Kunst*, modernism had become, in Robert Jensen’s words, “an exclusively French property,”<sup>107</sup> and this had long-lasting effects. When Max Deri published an “evolutionary description of painting in the nineteenth century” in 1919, he did not mention Whistler. It was one of the first art histories in which Impressionism was superseded by expressionism in Germany, and cubism and futurism in France and Italy.<sup>108</sup> In his 1926 landmark book on art of the twentieth century, Carl Einstein wrote along the same lines. The chapter on the historical preconditions of modern art focused on the Impressionists and Cézanne.<sup>109</sup> Whistler had never happened. The art history of Richard Muther had never happened.

Einstein’s book was a volume in the series of the *Propyläen-Kunstgeschichte*, the standard work of reference for generations of German scholars and students of art history. The volume dealing with the nineteenth century treated Whistler on just one-and-a-half pages, very much on Meier-Graefe’s terms: Whistler’s painting was considered “decorative to the finest taste and ravishingly ‘new’; but it is an arrangement and mere arts and crafts.” His portraits were said to be “unsimilar” and expressionless, not showing human beings but only decorative effects. In particular,

105 Meier-Graefe, *Entwicklungsgeschichte der modernen Kunst*, second ed., vol. 1, p. 88; vol. 2, pp. 258 and 413.

106 Julius Meier-Graefe, “Whistlers ‘L’art pour l’art,’” *Frankfurter Zeitung* (July 20, 1934), repr. in Carl Linfert (ed.), *Grundstoff der Bilder* (Munich, 1959), pp. 215–19.

107 Jensen, p. 235.

108 Max Deri, *Die Malerei im XIX. Jahrhundert: Entwicklungsgeschichtliche Darstellung auf psychologischer Grundlage*, 2 vols. (Berlin, 1919), vol. 1.

109 Carl Einstein, *Die Kunst des 20. Jahrhundert (Propyläen-Kunstgeschichte*, vol. xvi, Berlin, 1926), pp. 9–23.

Whistler's portrait of Duret was criticized, as it had already been in 1899 in Meier-Graefe's article on Manet.<sup>110</sup> The stamp of the *Entwicklungsgeschichte* is unmistakable. It enjoyed great popularity and exercised a normative influence both before and after World War II. Robert Jensen has noted Alfred Flechtheim's statement that it was "the most significant modernist art history of the era."<sup>111</sup>

Meier-Graefe moved to France in 1930 for health reasons and did not return to Germany after 1932. As an advocate of modern and French art, Meier-Graefe was considered by the Nazis as degenerate as the works he admired. At the Degenerate Art exhibition in Munich in 1937, a large photograph of him was put up in the entrance hall.<sup>112</sup> After the war, German art history rediscovered modern abstract art; a selection of Meier-Graefe's writings was published in 1959, and the second edition of the *Entwicklungsgeschichte* was reprinted in the 1960s. Kenworth Moffett, the author of the major study on Meier-Graefe as an art critic, noted in 1973 that it is "indeed remarkable ... how close the book is to our present view of the nineteenth century."<sup>113</sup> Present views have changed, but Moffett's remark bears witness to the profound effect of Meier-Graefe's *Entwicklungsgeschichte*. The new edition of the *Propyläen* in the 1960s again virtually omitted Whistler: the volume on the nineteenth century contained a short biography of Whistler in the reference section, but he was only named twice in passing in Fritz Novotny's article on Impressionism.<sup>114</sup> An exhibition at the Nationalgalerie in West Berlin in 1969 presented Whistler as an outsider.<sup>115</sup> It has remained his only one-man exhibition including paintings in Germany until the present day. Whistler's reputation never recovered from Meier-Graefe writing him out of German art history.

This story of Whistler, Richard Muther, and Julius Meier-Graefe is of course not a mono-causal chain of events that leads from Whistler's fame in Munich to German art-historical amnesia. It must be qualified by at least three considerations. The first is that after his death Whistler's reputation experienced ups and downs in the United States, in Great Britain, and in France as well. His star probably faded away much faster

110 Emil Waldmann, *Die Kunst des Realismus und des Impressionismus im 19. Jahrhundert (Propyläen-Kunstgeschichte)*, vol. xv, Berlin, 1927), pp. 90–91. Waldmann (p. 57) also compared a portrait by Wilhelm Trübner (1851–1917), *Lady in Grey* (1876, Folkwang Museum, Essen) to Whistler in general and found that beneath it the "highly acclaimed Englishman [appeared] pictorially barren."

111 Jensen, pp. 242–43; W. Sickert, "Straws from Cumberland Market," *Southport Visiter* [sic] (January 24, 1924) in Robins, *Walter Sickert*, pp. 470–80 (at p. 476) named Meier-Graefe as "probably the most important and influential critic in Europe." See also Jensen, pp. 13–14.

112 See Moffett, *Meier-Graefe as Art Critic*, p. 127.

113 Ibid., p. 50, p. 86.

114 Rudolf Zeidler (ed.), *Die Kunst des 19. Jahrhunderts (Propyläen-Kunstgeschichte)*, vol. xi, Berlin, 1966), p. 133.

115 See Nationalgalerie Staatliche Museen Preußischer Kulturbesitz (ed.), *James McNeill Whistler (1834–1903)* (Berlin, 1969).

in Paris than in Munich after 1905.<sup>116</sup> In 1925 Sickert wrote about Whistler's absence in Europe.<sup>117</sup> But in Germany, unlike the other countries, Whistler never became part of the tradition. The potential for reviving his reputation was always stronger in the countries where he had worked and lived, and of course in his native country.

The second qualification concerns the art history referred to here: it is the history of painting. As an etcher, Whistler's reputation remained unquestioned, even in Germany.<sup>118</sup> The third qualification has to do with expressionism, or modern art in Germany after 1905. It was in many aspects quite the opposite of the refined art of Whistler, and it was understood as more "modern." It was so modern that even Meier-Graefe disapproved of it. Nevertheless, the effect of his books was not just a symptom of art-historical fashion: they formed, rather than merely reflected, attitudes. The same is true for Richard Muther's *History of Modern Painting*, which not only presented a neo-idealistic or symbolist view of Whistler, but played an essential role in shaping it.<sup>119</sup> Meier-Graefe's views had superseded Muther's by the beginning of World War I, and went further, to establish the values of art history in Germany for decades to come.

116 In this year Maurice Denis wrote that "the influence of Whistler is over.... The herd of imitators has ceased to follow him" (*L'influence de Whistler est finie.... Le troupeau des imitateurs a cessé de le suivre*); Maurice Denis, "La Peinture," *L'Ermitage* 16 (1905), pp. 309–19 (at p. 311).

117 W. Sickert, "With Wisest Sorrow," *Daily Telegraph* (April 1, 1925), in Robins, *Walter Sickert*, pp. 510–12 (at p. 510).

118 Hanna Hohl, *James McNeill Whistler: Die Graphik im Hamburger Kupferstichkabinett* (Hamburg, 1999), pp. 11–12. The graphic arts, however, are rarely the focus of scholarly interest, and Whistler's reputation as an etcher has always been one held by connoisseurs rather than the wider public. The German collectors of Whistler's prints still need to be investigated.

119 On the importance of Muther's book, see Jensen, pp. 212–19.



# Making Enemies: Whistler, the Manifesto, and Reactionary Modernism

Julian Hanna

“Almost I have become a professional writer in the process of defending my paintings,” Wyndham Lewis wrote in a 1939 introduction to a selection of “pamphlets, articles and manifestos,” drawn from the pages of his journals *Blast* (1914–15) and *The Tyro* (1921–22). He added: “Whistler’s admirable pamphleteering was a phenomenon of the same kind.”<sup>1</sup> The “admirable pamphleteering” that Lewis describes began in the aftermath of the *Whistler v. Ruskin* trial of 1878 and continued virtually unabated until the artist’s death in 1903. The pamphlets, issued in plain brown covers stamped with Whistler’s trademark butterfly insignia, include a lecture, court proceedings, polemical essays, and exhibition catalogues. Yet despite considerable evidence, his writing and his legendary public persona, brought together in *The Gentle Art of Making Enemies*, have seldom been considered as an influence on the London avant-garde that rose to prominence a decade after his death, or on what may be described more broadly as the “reactionary modernism” of Ezra Pound, Wyndham Lewis, and others.

It is well established that the young Pound dressed in a “dandified Whistler outfit” during his London years.<sup>2</sup> Pound admitted in 1916 that a friend had told him he was looking “more like Khr-r-ist and the late James MacNeil [*sic*] Whistler every year.”<sup>3</sup> But he also wrote about Whistler: he mentioned him in his critical essays, dedicated a poem to him (“To Whistler, American”), and included him as part of vorticism’s “ancestry” in the pages of *Blast* (fig. 9.1). During the winter of 1913–14, he read the Pennells’ *Life of Whistler* to William Butler Yeats at Stone Cottage in Sussex.<sup>4</sup> When he moved from London to Paris in 1921, Pound lived in Montparnasse at 70 rue Notre-Dame-des-Champs, the same street where Whistler had a studio (at No. 86) in the 1890s, and where he had spent time in the 1850s at the studio of Edward Poynter, Thomas Lamont, and Thomas Armstrong, the model for

1 Wyndham Lewis, “The Skeleton in the Cupboard Speaks,” in *Wyndham Lewis the Artist: From “Blast” to Burlington House* (London, 1939), pp. 67–68.

2 Humphrey Carpenter, *A Serious Character: The Life of Ezra Pound* (Boston, 1988), p. 802.

3 D. D. Paige, ed., *The Letters of Ezra Pound, 1907–1941* (London, 1951), p. 135.

4 Hugh Kenner, *The Mechanic Muse* (Oxford, 1987), p. 25.

the studio in Du Maurier's *Trilby*.<sup>5</sup> Whistler is also mentioned several times in *The Cantos*. Lewis, too, showed an early interest in the "Master." Like Whistler, Lewis was "Paris-finished"; he wrote to his mother from Paris in 1905, declaring, "the Whistler show is coming," and vowing to "try and profit by it."<sup>6</sup> The poet, critic, and philosopher T. E. Hulme, a formative influence on Pound and reactionary modernism, referred to Whistler in "A Lecture on Modern Poetry" (probably presented to the Poets' Club in November 1908) as an example of the way the moderns viewed the world. He wrote: "we perceive it in an entirely different way—no longer directly in the form of action, but as an impression, for example Whistler's pictures. We can't escape from the spirit of our times. What has found expression in painting as Impressionism will soon find expression in poetry as free verse."<sup>7</sup> Interestingly, when Pound later acknowledged Whistler's influence on vorticism, he placed Whistler and vorticism (along with "expressionism, neo-cubism, and imagism") in opposition to Impressionism, which he argued was a precursor to vorticism's rival, Italian Futurism.<sup>8</sup>

Contemporaries noted the connection between Whistler and his latter-day

EVERY CONCEPT, EVERY EMOTION PRESENTS ITSELF TO THE VIVID CONSCIOUSNESS IN SOME PRIMARY FORM. IT BELONGS TO THE ART OF THIS FORM. IF SOUND, TO MUSIC; IF FORMED WORDS, TO LITERATURE; THE IMAGE, TO POETRY; FORM, TO DESIGN; COLOUR IN POSITION, TO PAINTING; FORM OR DESIGN IN THREE PLANES, TO SCULPTURE; MOVEMENT TO THE DANCE OR TO THE RHYTHM OF MUSIC OR OF VERSES.

Elaboration, expression of second intensities, of dispersedness belong to the secondary sort of artist. Dispersed arts HAD a vortex.

Impressionism, Futurism, which is only an accelerated sort of impressionism, DENY the vortex. They are the CORPSES OF VORTICES. POPULAR BELIEFS, movements, etc., are the CORPSES OF VORTICES. Marinetti is a corpse.

#### THE MAN.

The vorticist relies not upon similarity or analogy, not upon likeness or mimicry.

In painting he does not rely upon the likeness to a beloved grandmother or to a caressable mistress.

VORTICISM is art before it has spread itself into a state of fluidity, of elaboration, of secondary applications.

#### ANCESTRY.

"All arts approach the conditions of music."—*Pater*

"An Image is that which presents an intellectual and emotional complex in an instant of time."—*Pound*.

"You are interested in a certain painting because it is an arrangement of lines and colours."—*Whistler*.

Picasso, Kandinski, father and mother, classicism and romanticism of the movement.

#### POETRY.

The vorticist will use only the primary media of his art.

The primary pigment of poetry is the IMAGE.

The vorticist will not allow the primary expression of any concept or emotion to drag itself out into mimicry.

In painting Kandinski, Picasso.

In poetry this by, "II. D."

Whirl up sea —  
Whirl your pointed pines,  
Splash your great pines  
On our rocks,  
Hurl your green over us,  
Cover us with your pools of fir.

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FIG. 9.1 Ezra Pound, "Vortex. Pound"; from Wyndham Lewis, ed., *BLAST: Review of the Great English Vortex*, No. 1, 1914, p. 154.

5 Nicholas Daly, "The Woman in White: Whistler, Hiffernan, Courbet, Du Maurier," *Modernism/Modernity* 12, no. 1 (2005), pp. 1–25 (at p. 24).

6 Extracts from two separate letters, in W. K. Rose, ed., *The Letters of Wyndham Lewis* (London, 1963), pp. 19–20.

7 Karen Csengeri, ed., *The Collected Writings of T. E. Hulme* (Oxford, 1994), p. 53.

8 Ezra Pound, "Vorticism," in Ira B. Nadel, ed., *Ezra Pound: Early Writings* (London, 2005), pp. 278–91 (at p. 287).

disciples. Richard Aldington, for example, claimed in his memoirs that, in the pre-war period, "Ezra had read Whistler's *Gentle Art of Making Enemies*, and practised it without the 'gentle.'"<sup>9</sup> Ernest Hemingway wrote a piece intended for the *Little Review* in 1921 that satirized Pound's Whistlerian pose, but then thought better of publishing it.<sup>10</sup> In a review of *Pavannes and Divisions* (1918), Pound's first collection of critical essays and manifestos, Louis Untermeyer used the comparison to scathing effect: "The nimble arrogance of Whistler has been a bad example for him. For where Whistler carried off his impertinences with a light and dazzling dexterity, Pound, a far heavier-handed controversialist, begins by being truculent and ends by being tiresome."<sup>11</sup> Similarly, Paul Nash must have known the pain his words would cause when he wrote to Lewis during a disagreement in 1919: "Altho' I recognise you as a man of wit... it is not of the spontaneous order. There is nothing of the Whistler about you."<sup>12</sup>

In fact there are substantial traces of Whistler in the modernism of Pound and Lewis. It is most evident in their manifestos, which employ the same adversarial persona and theatrical violence found in *The Gentle Art of Making Enemies*. Pound and Lewis, as well as Hulme — three of the prewar avant-garde's most prolific polemicists and the architects of imagism and vorticism — actively sought to exorcize Whistler's associations with the Victorian era and to claim him as a kindred spirit. In his recent book on avant-garde manifestos, Martin Puchner singles out the London avant-garde of Pound and Lewis for its peculiar "rear-guard" actions (a term used by Lewis in 1937). "Rear-guardism," according to Puchner, "is a defensive formation that places itself within the field of advancement but is skeptical of its most extreme practitioners.... Caught between advancing and retreating, the rear guard... find[s] itself alone and surrounded by enemies everywhere."<sup>13</sup> This aptly describes the Pound of "Imagisme" (published under F. S. Flint's name), and its companion piece, the anti-manifesto "A Few Don'ts by an Imagiste" (1913). The first piece states coyly:

*The imagistes admitted that they were contemporaries of the Post Impressionists and the Futurists; but they had nothing in common with these schools. They had not published a manifesto. They were not a revolutionary school; their only endeavor was to write in accordance with the best tradition.... They had a few rules, drawn up for their own satisfaction only, and they had not published them.*

9 Richard Aldington, *Life for Life's Sake* (London, 1968), p. 96.

10 Carpenter, *A Serious Character*, p. 424.

11 Reprinted in Eric Homberger, ed., *Ezra Pound: The Critical Heritage* (London, 1997), p. 144.

12 *Letters of Wyndham Lewis*, p. 108.

13 Martin Puchner, *Poetry of the Revolution: Marx, Manifestos, and the Avant-Gardes* (Princeton, 2006), p. 108.

A list of rules is produced immediately thereafter, followed by further contrary claims:

*They held also a certain "Doctrine of the Image," which they had not committed to writing; they said that it did not concern the public, and would provoke useless discussion.*<sup>14</sup>

The rear-guard attitude of imagism is shared by vorticism, which tried to outmanoeuvre Futurism by attacking everything — past, present, and future — and claiming nothing, or nothing that was not elsewhere contradicted. "Rear-guardism" also describes Whistler's career, post-Ruskin, as a pamphleteer and provocateur: his attacks on his former disciple, Oscar Wilde, anticipated vorticism's attacks on Futurism, and Lewis's attacks on Bloomsbury "dilettantes." More importantly, Whistler's rear-guard manifesto, the *Ten O'Clock*, closes perversely with a call for the audience to do nothing, rather than something: "cast away all care — resolved that all is well — as it ever was — and that it is not meet that we should be cried at, and urged to take measures!"<sup>15</sup>

The manifesto, a genre set apart by extreme sentiments, a dynamic style, and an historical connection to war and violence, is an impulsive form. It is brought into being, as Tristan Tzara writes in the *Dada Manifesto* of 1918, when you "lose your patience and sharpen your wings to conquer."<sup>16</sup> Whistler's "object" in assembling *The Gentle Art of Making Enemies*, according to the Pennells, "was to expose for all time the stupidity and ridicule which he was obliged to face, so that his method of defence should be the better understood."<sup>17</sup> Whistler's "method of defence" contained a great deal of offence, and this simultaneous defending and attacking contributed importantly to the emergence of the artistic manifesto in Britain. Insofar as it is a manifesto, as the Pennells claim, Whistler's book must also be a declaration of principles. (The Pennells, acting perhaps in response to the cultural and political events of 1910, which included Roger Fry's first post-Impressionist exhibition, Marinetti's visit to London, and militant action by suffragists, introduced the term to a description of *The Gentle Art* in the revised, single-volume 1911 edition of their biography: "The book," they wrote, "which may be read for its wit, is really his Manifesto.")<sup>18</sup> But what James Laver described, in reference to the *Ten O'Clock* lecture, as "mild and reasonable doctrine" — the ostensible substance — is often obscured by a highly theatrical presentation.<sup>19</sup> Like most manifestos, *The Gentle Art* is short on "reasonable doctrine" and long on petty squabbles, insults, and bombast.

<sup>14</sup> See Nadel, ed., *Early Writings*, p. 109–10.

<sup>15</sup> Whistler, *The Gentle Art*, p. 158.

<sup>16</sup> Reprinted in Mary Ann Caws, ed., *Manifesto: A Century of Isms* (Lincoln, Neb., 2001), p. 297.

<sup>17</sup> Pennell, *Life*, vol. 2, p. 108.

<sup>18</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 292.

<sup>19</sup> James Laver, *Whistler* (London, 1930), p. 229.

The dichotomy between these two elements, “reasonable doctrine” and rhetorical bravado, is built into the very layout of the book. At the top of every left-hand page is printed in bold, “THE GENTLE ART,” and at the top of every right-hand page is the rejoinder, “OF MAKING ENEMIES.” William Blake’s “Public Address” of 1809, a very early artistic manifesto, described the same divided motive. Blake wrote: “Resentment for Personal Injuries has had some share in this Public Address but Love to My Art & Zeal for my Country a much Greater.”<sup>20</sup> Whistler’s book, mocked by one critic (after Whistler’s death) as “The Gentle Art of Resenting Injuries,” embodies the violent and conflicted character of the manifesto.<sup>21</sup> It displays the tension between espousing grand theories and engaging in petty factional fighting; the balance sought between valuing the autonomy and integrity of the work of art and acknowledging the growing importance of the artist’s public performance.

A cursory study of definitions and etymologies reveals that the manifesto has always been about “making enemies.” *Black’s Law Dictionary* (1891) defines it as “a formal written declaration, promulgated by a prince, or by the executive authority of a state or nation, proclaiming its reasons and motives for declaring a war.”<sup>22</sup> (This definition is softened somewhat in the first *Oxford English Dictionary* entry, which omits specific mention of war and adds a concession to democracy: “or by an individual or body of individuals whose proceedings are of public importance.”)<sup>23</sup> It is one of a group of terms adapted from military origins, in the same company as “avant-garde” and “polemic,” which derives from the Greek word for war. This connection to war is important: it is present in Whistler’s pose as a “West Point man,” and in Lewis’s “Enemy” persona.

Samuel Johnson’s *Dictionary* of 1755 defines the manifesto as a “public protestation,” and employs an illustration from Joseph Addison: “It was proposed to draw up a manifesto, setting forth the grounds and motives of our taking arms.”<sup>24</sup> There is also a legal dimension to the term’s history, revealed in the original seventeenth-century definition of the manifesto as a “proof” or “piece of evidence.”<sup>25</sup> Whistler, who was once described by William Michael Rossetti as “a man of pugnacious or litigious turn,” often played the role of plaintiff in his artistic disputes.<sup>26</sup> But in seeking recompense for a perceived injury,

20 David Erdmann, ed., *The Complete Poetry and Prose of William Blake* (New York, 1988), p. 574. Blake’s exhibition catalogues, with their passionate defense against accusations of “eccentricity” and lack of “finish,” and their attacks on “blockheads,” “amateurs,” and “enemies of Genius,” bear a strong resemblance to Whistler’s catalogues and pamphlets.

21 Frederick Keppel, *The Gentle Art of Resenting Injuries* (New York, 1904), n.p.

22 *Black’s Law Dictionary* (1891; 4th ed., St. Paul’s, 1951).

23 “Manifesto,” *The Oxford English Dictionary* (1st ed., 1928).

24 Samuel Johnson, *A Dictionary of the English Language* (1755; reprint, London, 1979).

25 “Manifesto,” *The Oxford English Dictionary* (2nd ed., 1989).

26 Quoted in Pennell, *Life*, vol. 1, p. 119.

he acted by turns as a butterfly broken on the wheel of criticism and a butterfly that concealed a scorpion's sting. Despite a certain resemblance, it would be wrong to suggest that the artistic manifesto merely replicates the old forms used in legal and political contexts; rather, it is a highly elastic reinterpretation, with a strong element of parody. (It may be helpful to think here of Whistler's parody of Ruskin's preacher in the *Ten O'Clock*.) "Being unfaithful to some 'heroic' form of manifesto," Puchner has argued, "is the best way of being faithful to the avant-garde manifesto."<sup>27</sup>

Anderson and Koval's biography of Whistler attempts to right the imbalance, as they saw it, between the myth of his life and his art. "Whistler has been singularly, if unwittingly, mistreated by his biographers," the book argues. "[T]hey have been seduced by the mythology and have separated the colourful and controversial character from the key element of his life, his art."<sup>28</sup> It must be remembered, however, that it was not only Whistler's biographers who were "seduced by the mythology." Max Beerbohm was one of many contemporaries who admired Whistler's talents aside from painting and etching. He went so far as to call Whistler "timid" in his art but "a brilliantly effortless butterfly" in his pose, and "a butterfly equipped with sharp little beak and talons" in his writing.<sup>29</sup> The perceived timidity of Whistler's art might be one reason why Pound and Lewis chose in most cases to emphasize his personality and writing when they made reference to him.

To illustrate the power, and the bloody-mindedness, of the Whistler myth in the years immediately following his death, there is no more striking example than Haldane Macfall's book *Whistler: Butterfly, Wasp, Wit, Master of the Arts, Enigma*, in which the artist-hero is shown "blithely stepping into frays for mere love of a quip; like one of those tempestuous dons of his beloved Velasquez." In this book Whistler is described as having in his veins "the blood of the dictators . . . dapper, fire-eating, striking insults with his cane across offending shoulders, calling men out to duel."<sup>30</sup> The swashbuckling dandy that Macfall described was a common heroic type among writers of manifestos in the late nineteenth and early twentieth century. Yeats, writing in 1891, found hope for an independent Ireland in the example set by the seventeenth-century "rakes and duellists" of the Hellfire Club, who terrorized the authorities and demonstrated a rebellious spirit that needed only "the responsibility of self-government" to channel its "vast energy."<sup>31</sup>

27 Martin Puchner, "Manifesto=Theatre," *Theatre Journal* 54 (2002), pp. 449–65 (at p. 460).

28 Anderson and Koval, p. xiv.

29 Beerbohm's article, "Whistler's Writing," first appeared in *The Metropolitan Magazine* in September 1904; reprinted in Robin Spencer, ed., *Whistler: A Retrospective* (New York, 1989), p. 354.

30 Haldane Macfall, *Whistler: Butterfly, Wasp, Wit, Master of the Arts, Enigma* (Edinburgh, 1905), pp. 9 and 15.

31 William Butler Yeats, "A Reckless Century: Irish Rakes and Duellists," in John P. Frayne, ed., *Uncollected Prose* (London, 1970), vol. 1, pp. 198–202 (at p. 202).

Yeats discovered evidence for his thesis in a trio of modern “Irish” controversialists: Wilde (who had just published “Pen, Pencil and Poison”), Bernard Shaw, and, rather surprisingly, Whistler. He claimed Whistler on the basis that he was “half an Irishman . . . I believe.” In Whistler, Shaw, and Wilde, Yeats found “something of the same spirit that filled Ireland once with gallant, irresponsible ill-doing.”<sup>32</sup>

The Whistler myth, supported by *The Gentle Art*, had a considerable impact on the prewar avant-garde in Britain. Vorticism, in the voice of Pound, acknowledged its debt to Whistler in 1914 in the pages of *Blast*. Pound also affirmed his allegiance elsewhere in this period: “Our battle began with Whistler,” he wrote in *Gaudier-Brzeska* in 1916. “Whistler was the only man working in England in the Eighties who would have known what we are at and would have backed us against the mob.”<sup>33</sup> A review of Pound’s book in the *Dial* declared that, with “his humor, his rhetoric against the Philistine, and especially the theories of art . . . Mr. Pound assumes, not without a certain right, the mantle of Whistler.”<sup>34</sup> Four years earlier, in October 1912, “To Whistler, American” was the opening poem and de facto manifesto of the first issue of *Poetry* magazine. Here Pound seized upon Whistler’s nationality (as Yeats had earlier made use of the “Irish” Whistler), calling him “our first great”; a role model to those younger artists, “Who bear the brunt of our America / And try to wrench her impulse into art.”<sup>35</sup> It is significant that neither Pound nor Lewis ever included Whistler in their tirades against the Victorian era and aestheticism. Lewis would have recognized common ground with Whistler in his main targets of attack, the “amateur” artists and Bloomsbury coteries which are akin to the “Dilettante,” “amateur,” and “aesthete” in Whistler’s *Ten O’Clock*.<sup>36</sup> In his famous lecture, Whistler railed against “the false prophets, who have brought the very name of the beautiful into disrepute, and derision upon themselves.”<sup>37</sup> He took aim at his old adversary Ruskin when he spoke of the “Gentle priest of the Philistine,” while Lewis, writing a half-century later, called Roger Fry “the great apostle of British amateurism.”<sup>38</sup>

Whistler’s dangerous reputation gave force and drama to his manifestos. He established this reputation through his antics with the press. “Where to begin!!” he wrote excitedly to Waldo Story on the occasion of his successful exhibition of Venice etchings

32 Yeats, “Oscar Wilde’s Last Book,” in Frayne, *Uncollected Prose*, vol. 1, pp. 202–205 (at p. 205).

33 Ezra Pound, *Gaudier-Brzeska: A Memoir* (London, 1916), p. 145.

34 Reprinted in Homburger, ed., *The Critical Heritage*, p. 120.

35 Pound, *Collected Shorter Poems* (London, 1990), p. 235.

36 In the *Ten O’Clock*, Whistler warns: “The Dilettante stalks abroad. The amateur is loosed. The voice of the aesthete is heard in the land, and catastrophe is upon us.” Whistler, *The Gentle Art*, p. 152.

37 *Ibid.*, p. 136.

38 *Ibid.*, p. 150; Walter Michel and C. J. Fox, eds., *Wyndham Lewis on Art: Collected Writings, 1913–1956* (London, 1969), p. 58.

at the Fine Art Society in 1883. “Well — Games you know! of course — Amazing! — Really I do believe ‘I am a devil.’” He described with glee the exhibition catalogue *Mr. Whistler and His Critics*, which cleverly turned adverse criticism against the men who wrote it: “I put their nose to the grindstone and turn the wheel with a whirr! — I just let it spin! — stopping at nothing.... I give ‘em Hell!” He added, finally: “The whole thing is a joy — and indeed a masterpiece of Mischief!”<sup>39</sup> Whistler’s controversialist tactics were passed on to the next generation of artists, remaining essentially the same up to the watershed of World War I. Lewis described very Whistlerian mock battles with public and press in his memoir of the period, *Blasting and Bombardiering*:

*The Press in 1914 had no Cinema, no Radio, and no Politics: so the painter could really become a “star.” There was nothing against it. Anybody could become one, who did anything funny. And Vorticism was replete with humour.... “Kill John Bull with Art!” I shouted. And John and Mrs. Bull leapt for joy, in a cynical convulsion. For they felt as safe as houses. So did I.*<sup>40</sup>

Violence is central to Whistler’s letters, both public and private. It usually emerged in response to his critics. The violent metaphors express by turns anger and frustration, and an exuberant sense of potency. As his landmark second exhibition of Venice etchings and drypoints in 1883 drew to a close, Whistler described the scene as the aftermath of a battle. “The critics simply slaughtered and lying round in masses!” he exclaimed. “The people divided into opposite bodies, for and against — but all violent! — and the Gallery full! — and above all the Catalogue selling like mad!”<sup>41</sup> To Frances Leyland, in March 1876, Whistler wrote: “My enemies all round I shall route [sic] and ruin and in short slay all over the place!”<sup>42</sup> To the architect Edward William Godwin, in May 1878, he compared a minor victory in his dealings over the “White House” in Chelsea to victory in war: “I again fell back on my own resources — made a sudden flank movement — reserved my fire until I ‘saw the whites of their eyes,’ as was the practice of Gen[era]l Jackson when he whipped the Britishers before, and then let fly ... bang! down came the flag instantly!”<sup>43</sup> Metaphors of the American Civil War are common in the letters, and so are references to being “on the warpath” and to “scalping” enemies. Joseph Comyns Carr was told, for example, “you can fancy the pride with which I fasten your scalp to my belt! — You die hard though Joseph!”<sup>44</sup> A

39 Letter from Whistler to Waldo Story, [February 5, 1883], Pierpont Morgan Library, New York, MAH 244, GUW 09430.

40 Wyndham Lewis, *Blasting and Bombardiering* (London, 1982), p. 36.

41 Whistler to Waldo Story, [March 1/7, 1883], PWC 2/61/2, GUW 08155.

42 Whistler to Frances Leyland, [March/May 1876], PWC 2/16/7, GUW 08056.

43 Whistler to Edward William Godwin, [May 23/25, 1878], GUL G110, GUW 01744.

44 Whistler to Joseph Comyns Carr, [December 24, 1878/January 1879], GUL C44, GUW 00543.

writer for the *Scots Observer* parroted Whistler's use of such broad American stereotypes in a favorable review of *The Gentle Art* (which was duly added to the book). He described Whistler's method: "when he encounters [a critic] in the ways of error, he leaps upon him joyously, scalps him in print before the eyes of men, kicks him gaily back into the paths of truth and soberness."<sup>45</sup>

Whistler's writings also contain many instances in which the tools of his trade are employed, metaphorically, in violent exchanges with critics. Etching needles, paintbrushes, and pens are used to "slay," "pierce," and "sting" his critics and adversaries. Carefully eliding his new role as author in the pamphlet *Whistler v. Ruskin: Art and Art Critics*, Whistler wrote of "war" "between the brush and the pen."<sup>46</sup> In a letter, meanwhile, Whistler described an altercation with William Stott in the Hogarth Club in January 1889 as if he had composed a work of art. "Stott 'of Oldham', is dead!" he wrote, "that is to say I gave him a splendid couple of slaps and an elegant kick on the behind... all in the most perfect and distinguished way possible! — You would have been delighted! — A real etching! Whistler with the butterfly engraved on Stott's rear! 'a masterpiece' as you say."<sup>47</sup> Arthur Symons called Whistler's wit "a weapon, used as seriously as any rapier in an eternal duel with the eternal enemy."<sup>48</sup> Mallarmé, in a similar vein, described his friend "back in battle, fighting, against the world, with this fragile weapon of your brush."<sup>49</sup>

Wyndham Lewis, in his self-created role as the "Enemy," displayed a similar bravado. He described his pen as a "dangerous polemical lance"; when he used a typewriter, it was a "*Corona* rattling away like a machine-gun." In the same 1931 preface (to *The Diabolical Principle*), he acknowledged Whistler's manifesto writing as a precursor to his own: "Whistler's pen was never at rest, in defence of the creations of his brush — every creative act of the butterfly-brush was accompanied by a critical or *militant* operation of the pen."<sup>50</sup> This was echoed in an unpublished attack on the Bloomsbury Group, in which Lewis wrote: "today your artist has to carry a gun, make no mistake as to that." "Whistler," he went on, "had to keep a park of verbal artillery at the pretorian gate of his embattled workshop, trained

45 Whistler, *The Gentle Art*, p. 277.

46 Ibid., p. 25.

47 "Stott 'of Oldham', est mort! c'est à dire je lui ai fichu une splendide paire de gifles et un élégant coup de pied au derrière... le tout de la façon la plus parfaite et distinguée possible! — Vous en auriez été ravi! — Une vraie eau forte! Whistler avec le papillon gravé au cul du Stott! 'Un chef d'oeuvre!' comme vous dites —"; Whistler to Alfred Stevens, [January 11/18, 1889], PWC 2/59/4, GUW 08141.

48 Arthur Symons, "Whistler," from *Studies in the Seven Arts* (1906), reprinted in Spencer, *Whistler: A Retrospective*, pp. 347–51 (at p. 349).

49 Stéphane Mallarmé to Whistler, June 30, 1888, coll. Mondor, GUW 13436.

50 Wyndham Lewis, *The Diabolical Principle and the Dithyrambic Spectator* (London, 1931), pp. vi–viii.

constantly towards ‘the enemy,’ in order to secure for himself the modicum of time he needed to paint his mama, or the rugged features of Thomas Carlyle.”<sup>51</sup> Lewis also employed a military metaphor to describe his important decision to give up “the ‘group’ game” — the involvement with artistic movements like vorticism — and become a permanent outsider. He decided to launch his attacks, he wrote in 1939, “not as part of a rather bogus battalion, but as *a single spy*.”<sup>52</sup>

Whistler’s court case against Ruskin marked his first attempt to cultivate the violent image of an artist who, without losing his composure or his sense of humor, “slays” enemy critics. There is a certain irony, therefore, in the central premise of Whistler’s lawsuit; the premise being that Ruskin overstepped the mark into libel by using “violent language” to attack Whistler personally, rather than merely criticizing his work. Whistler’s attorney wrote in a letter before the trial:

*As however the [defendant] has travelled beyond criticism of the picture & launched violent criticism of the [plaintiff] himself & his motives & as in such cases the temperance or violence of the language used is largely to be considered the libel itself will be sufficient & the proper evidence for the [proof?] of malice.*<sup>53</sup>

Perhaps more common than any doctrine of aesthetics, though usually overlooked, livelihood is a primary concern of many manifestos. The most urgent manifestos are those that represent the artist’s fight for survival, either by clearing space to launch a career in an overcrowded field of competing “isms,” or by defending a career against perceived attacks from critics, “amateurs” and “apes” who would prevent the dedicated artist from earning a living. It is no coincidence that conspiracy and paranoia figure prominently in many manifestos.

Livelihood is the central theme of the “Encyclical,” a fictional manifesto that first appeared in the *Criterion* in April 1924, and later became a chapter of Lewis’s anti-Bloomsbury satire, *The Apes of God* (1930). Horace Zagreus, the ostensible author of this manifesto, rails, like Whistler, against the democratization of art that is being encouraged by the “economist-utopist,” and the resultant crowding out of the “genuine painter” in favor of the wealthier “hordes” who occupy valuable studio space. “They are the *un*paying guests of the house of art: the crowd of thriving valets who adopt the livery of this noble but now decayed establishment, *pour se donner un air*; to mock, in their absence, its masters,” Zagreus declares.<sup>54</sup> Against these “apes,”

51 Wyndham Lewis, “Say it With Leaves,” unpublished manuscript, Cornell University Library, [1934–36], pp. 3–5.

52 Lewis, *Wyndham Lewis the Artist*, p. 69.

53 George Mallows Freeman to James Anderson Rose, April 10, 1878, PWC, GUW 11999.

54 Wyndham Lewis, “*The Apes of God*: Extract from Encyclical Addressed to Daniel Boleyn by Mr. Zagreus,” *Criterion* 2, no. 7 (April 1924), pp. 300–10 (at p. 305).

Lewis acted, in his own words, as “a sort of public bodyguard.”<sup>55</sup> *Satire and Fiction*, a collage of polemic and press clippings similar in form to Whistler’s innovative pamphlets, like the catalogue to the second series of Venice etchings and drypoints exhibited in 1883, was published alongside *The Apes of God* as a pre-emptive strike against anyone seeking to undermine the novel’s reception.<sup>56</sup> The pamphlet serves as a perfect example of the manifesto’s ties to practical concerns of livelihood, which relate in turn to the aggressiveness of the form. Lewis wrote: “When you belong as I said to no ‘cell’ or mutual-help-society (like ‘Bloomsbury,’ for instance) ... then, once more, the pamphlet must be called in.... *The Apes of God* has to be defended and explained, as well as written and published.”<sup>57</sup> Although he had no “cell,” Lewis claimed to speak for other artists who existed outside the coterie system: “In defending myself I play a not unuseful part, and defend many, many, other people.”<sup>58</sup>

In some cases, an artistic manifesto calls for a revolution that transcends the boundaries between art and society; it calls for signatories to form a common front. André Breton and Leon Trotsky’s *Manifesto for an Independent Revolutionary Art* (1938) is one such example. In Whistler’s case, however, *The Gentle Art*, and specifically the *Ten O’Clock* (first delivered as a lecture in 1885, then published as a pamphlet in 1888), announced a military coup more than a popular uprising. Indeed Whistler was reacting against a popular movement, and attempting to preserve a privileged artistic elite, when he reversed the charge leveled against him by Ruskin’s infamous review of *Nocturne in Black and Gold: The Falling Rocket* (see fig. 2.1) — the charge of being a “coxcomb” and lacking professionalism — by mocking the “amateurs” who made art “a sort of common topic for the tea-table.”<sup>59</sup>

In 1868, Whistler had tried to explain his outlook in a letter to the Burlington Fine Arts Club (following a violent incident):

*The world is understood to contain some gentlemen besides English gentlemen; some codes of social honour besides the English; & some communities in wh[ich] practices such as that of duelling... are not yet obsolete. This may be unfortunate or censurable, but a fact it is: & it is also a fact that I happen to be a Virginian, a cadet of the Military Academy of West Point, & for many years a resident in France.*<sup>60</sup>

Whistler’s association with images like the butterfly-wasp, the demon of “dainty

55 Lewis, *Rude Assignment: An Intellectual Autobiography* (Santa Barbara, Calif., 1984), p. 216.

56 Wyndham Lewis, *Satire and Fiction* (London, 1930).

57 Lewis, *The Diabolical Principle*, p. ix.

58 Lewis, *Rude Assignment*, p. 216.

59 Whistler, *The Gentle Art*, p. 135.

60 Letter (draft) from Whistler to the Burlington Fine Arts Club, [January 7, 1868], GUL R142, GUW 05246.

cruelty,”<sup>61</sup> and the elegant fighting birds of *The Peacock Room* all relate to his aristocratic-military pose. It is interesting to note that in the Dreyfus affair that divided France at the turn of the century, Whistler apparently sided with the French military. If we are to believe Arthur Eddy, “Whistler held some extraordinary opinions concerning the Dreyfus case,” which were “the outcome of his strong military bias.”<sup>62</sup> Those who sided with the military in this case found themselves in the company of Charles Maurras and his reactionary movement and periodical, *L’Action française*, which seized upon the issue to gain support for an extreme right-wing, monarchist platform. Maurras also found support a decade later among the British avant-garde through the interest of Hulme and others. There is a discernible strand of British modernism, from Whistler and Yeats to Pound, Hulme, and Lewis, that is individualist and anti-democratic, and it is closely intertwined with the peculiar history of the manifesto in Britain.

In the politically divided 1930s, Pound and Lewis continued to cite Whistler as an antecedent for their reactionary polemics. Contrary to any notion of the manifesto being an anonymous, collective production, Lewis used the form to insist that “to create is to be individual,” calling artistic collectives “a syndicalist myth.” In 1931, he attacked the “*communizing* principle,” which he saw “at work continually, producing larger and larger, and more and more closely disciplined, non-individualist units.”<sup>63</sup> Pound’s response to the *Left Review*’s 1937 manifesto-petition *Authors Take Sides on the Spanish War* (filed, inexplicably, under the heading “Neutral?”) is telling for its rejection of the medium even before the message. “Questionnaire an escape mechanism for young fools who are too cowardly to think,” he wrote. “Spain is an emotional luxury to a gang of sap-headed dilettantes.”<sup>64</sup> T. S. Eliot’s response to the survey is gentler in tone but no less wary of the exercise: “While I am naturally sympathetic, I still feel convinced that it is best that at least a few men of letters should remain isolated, and *take no part in these collective activities*.”<sup>65</sup>

The *Ten O’Clock* is noticeably free of the violent rhetoric that marks most of the other pamphlets and letters in *The Gentle Art*. Whistler did not specifically name his targets, although Wilde, for one, knew when he was being attacked. Whistler’s highly edited version of Wilde’s review of the *Ten O’Clock* reads: “There were some arrows... shot off... and (O, *mea culpa!*) at dress reformers most of all.”<sup>66</sup> The press

61 Phrase used by Whistler in a letter to Waldo Story; see note 39, above.

62 Arthur Jerome Eddy, *Recollections and Impressions of James A. McNeill Whistler* (Philadelphia, 1903), p. 45.

63 Lewis, *The Diabolical Principle*, p. vii.

64 *Authors Take Sides on the Spanish War* (London, 1937), n.p.

65 Ibid.

66 Whistler, *The Gentle Art*, p. 161.

described Whistler's performance in the violent language with which he had become associated, despite Whistler's attempt to shock his audience with his reason and decorum. His own collection of press clippings includes *Vanity Fair's* comment that his "epigrams are of the finest and most rapier-like kind," and that he is a "practiced duellist"; *Punch's* observation that he "delivered many well-aimed thrusts with the keen rapier of epigrammatic satire"; and the *Birmingham Weekly Post's* report that "he assailed his enemies — the critics; he speared like a Soudanese, and so brilliant arrows of scorn and satire flashed through the white hall till after eleven o'clock."<sup>67</sup>

Roger Fry wrote in 1903 that Whistler "seemed to be always inaugurating a revolution, leading intransigent youth against the strongholds of tradition and academic complacency."<sup>68</sup> A decade later, vorticism "blasted" Fry and the "Brittanic aesthete" while naming Whistler as an "ancestor."<sup>69</sup> Bloomsbury and aestheticism are conflated and attacked as one in the pages of *Blast*. Lewis wrote: "To believe that it is necessary for or conducive to art, to 'Improve' life, for instance — make architecture, dress, ornament, in 'better taste,' is absurd."<sup>70</sup> This statement reiterates Whistler's criticisms in the *Ten O'Clock*, that art is "selfishly occupied with her own perfection only — having no desire to teach."<sup>71</sup> The second issue of *Blast* continued this line of attack, referring to "Mr. Roger Fry's little belated Morris movement" and "Mr. Fry's curtain and pincushion factory in Fitzroy Square."<sup>72</sup> Fry became, to vorticism, any number of Whistler's adversaries, showing in turn aspects of Wilde, Ruskin, and William Morris.

One of *Blast's* dicta is that "great artists in England are always revolutionary." The "Review of the Great English Vortex," as it called itself, set out to be "an avenue for all those vivid and violent ideas that could reach the Public in no other way."<sup>73</sup> Whistler's formalist doctrine is acknowledged in the pages of *Blast*, but it was hardly revolutionary in 1914, and it is not the most important aspect of Whistler's influence. The manifesto entitled "Vortex. Pound" includes, under the heading "Ancestry," Pound's approximation of Whistler's famous saying about one's interest in a painting lying not in subject matter but only in the "arrangement of lines and colours."<sup>74</sup> The reference

67 These quotations are taken from "Mr. Whistler's 'Ten O'Clock' — Opinions of the Press, 1885," a collection of press cuttings, GUL 468.

68 Roger Fry, "Mr Whistler," *Athenaeum*, July 25, 1903, reprinted in Spencer, *Whistler: A Retrospective*, pp. 345–47 (at p. 345).

69 Fry is disguised as "C. B. Fry," the cricketer, in Lewis, ed., *Blast* 1 (1914), p. 21.

70 Lewis, *Blast*, p. 33.

71 Whistler, *The Gentle Art*, p. 136.

72 Lewis, ed., *Blast* 2 (1915), pp. 46 and 41, respectively.

73 Lewis, *Blast*, p. 7.

74 Lewis, *Blast*, p. 154.

to Whistler was repeated by Pound in an essay on “Vortographs” — vorticist experiments in photography by Pound and Alvin Langdon Coburn using a purpose-built invention called a “Vortoscope” — where he seems to make Whistler an honorary vorticist by transferring ownership of the phrase: “The vorticist principle is that a painting is an expression by means of an arrangement of form and colour in the same way that a piece of music is an expression by means of an arrangement of sound.”<sup>75</sup> But *Blast* needed to go beyond the formalist rhetoric also being voiced by Roger Fry and Clive Bell, and as a result the most memorable thing about the first issue of *Blast* is its strong polemical tone and startling outward appearance: “That hugest and pinkest of all magazines,” Lewis recalled in 1950, “... did more than would a score of exhibitions to make the public feel that something was happening.”<sup>76</sup>

Rebecca Beasley has shown recently that Pound tried but ultimately failed in the prewar years to incorporate Whistler’s aesthetic principles into his

brand of modernism. Instead, he emptied out the substance of Whistler’s message, which had become passé or too widely accepted, and retained the presentation — what Beasley accurately describes as “Whistler’s anti-establishment, anti-popular stance.”<sup>77</sup> The story of Pound’s early interest in Whistler is often told as evidence of a transitional, youthful aestheticism that gave way to Pound’s “harder” modernism. Less familiar is the story of the continuing importance Whistler’s adversarial persona had for Pound. In 1918, for example, late in his London career, Pound demonstrated an admiration for Whistler’s aggressive pose that had little to do with any formalist doctrine. The frontispiece for *Pavannes*

FIG. 9.2 Emil Otto Hoppé, *Ezra Pound*; from Ezra Pound, *Pavannes and Divisions*, New York, 1918, frontispiece.



75 Ezra Pound, *Pavannes and Divisions* (New York, 1918), p. 251. Also see Carpenter, *A Serious Character*, pp. 281–82.

76 Lewis, *Rude Assignment*, p. 135.

77 Rebecca Beasley, “Ezra Pound’s Whistler,” *American Literature* 74, no. 3 (September 2002), pp. 485–516 (at p. 493).

*and Divisions* is a photograph taken by Emil Otto Hoppé (fig. 9.2), the London-based photographer whose clients included many of the period's leading writers and artists (among them Woolf and Marinetti). Pound sat for his portrait in the manner of Whistler's *Arrangement in Grey and Black, No. 2: Portrait of Thomas Carlyle* (see fig. 10.2), but this apparent homage was further complicated by the fact that Pound more closely resembled Whistler himself, as Lewis explains:

[H]e posed in raking silhouette, his overcoat trailing in reminiscence of Carlyle (though with swagger and rhetoric). But being an interloping American — like “Jimmie” before him — aggressing among the sleepy islanders, ramming novelties down their expostulating throats — and so on — it would be the “gentle master” at the easel (a “Bowery tough” according to his disciple, Sickert, in conversation with Me — tough in defence of his most gentle and defenceless art) rather than the sitter of whom Pound would be thinking: the author of “*The Gentle Art of Making Enemies*,” not the old sage responsible for “*Latter Day Pamphlets*.”<sup>78</sup>

Two decades later, in December 1938, Pound sat for a portrait by Lewis, and the result is remarkably similar. *Portrait of Ezra Pound* (fig. 9.3) shows the subject again slumped in profile, looking slightly dishevelled, in a heavy black coat; but unlike the earlier portrait he appears to have dozed off momentarily. A piece of blue-and-white china sits on the table beside him, connecting him, through Ernest Fenollosa and Charles Lang Freer, back to Whistler. When the Tate Gallery bought the painting in 1939, it was a temporary neighbor to Whistler's *Carlyle*, on loan from Glasgow.<sup>79</sup>

Pound's nod to Whistler in *Pavannes and Divisions* makes perfect sense in light of the manifestos contained in the book, most notably “A Few Don'ts” and “The Serious Artist.” (“Be influenced by as many great artists as you can,” Pound wrote in the former piece, “but have the decency either to acknowledge the debt outright, or to try to conceal it.”)<sup>80</sup> Also included is “Prolegomena” (1912), which presents yet another “credo” on poetry. It begins with a virtual retelling of Whistler's story



FIG. 9.3 Wyndham Lewis, *Portrait of Ezra Pound*, 1939, Tate Britain, London, ©2007.

78 Lewis, *Blasting and Bombardiering*, p. 278.

79 See Paul O'Keefe, *Some Sort of Genius: A Life of Wyndham Lewis* (London, 2001), pp. 394–95.

80 Pound, *Pavannes and Divisions*, p. 98.

of “the first artist” in the *Ten O’Clock*, which described a harmonious society of professional artists and a public that “*had nothing to say in the matter*” (“And the Amateur was unknown — and the Dilettante undreamed of!”).<sup>81</sup> Pound’s version begins: “Time was when the poet lay in a green field with his head against a tree and played his diversion on a ha’penny whistle, and Caesar’s predecessors conquered the earth ... and let him alone.... [L]ooking back upon this naïve state of affairs we call it the age of gold.”<sup>82</sup>

Pound’s radio broadcasts from Italy during World War II provide further evidence of Whistler’s lasting influence. Pound continually focused in these broadcasts on vitality and its lack. He says of his early years in London, “It was in many ways a languid era, so few DID.”<sup>83</sup> Lewis, writing in the late 1940s about the Bloomsbury aesthetes he satirized in *The Apes of God*, concurred: “Nothing could change the kind of people of whom I wrote — they had not the necessary vitality for that.”<sup>84</sup> Whistler — the public figure and author of *The Gentle Art*, rather than the painter of “nocturnes” and “harmonies” — was by contrast a model for decisive action. Pound mentioned Whistler several times in July 1942. He quoted Whistler’s quip, made famous in the Ruskin trial, about asking two hundred guineas not for labor but “for the knowledge of a lifetime.”<sup>85</sup> He described Whistler’s “limitations” but called him, “with Henry James [one of] the two Americans who lit up the horizon of American youth at the turn of the century.”<sup>86</sup> Most tellingly, he repeated twice the story of an argument Whistler had with William Merritt Chase: “On one occasion he disagreed with Jimmy, and on being kidded, he broke off: ‘I won’t argue with you any longer.’ To which Mr. Whistler with weary patience: ‘But, Chase, I am NOT arguing with you. I am just telling you.’” (Whistler used this witty phrase in a letter to the *World* reprinted as “A Proposal” in *The Gentle Art*.)<sup>87</sup> For Pound, the story served to reinforce the authoritarian principles found in his radio broadcasts: the manifesto does not argue; it decrees or demands. Pound might also have quoted Whistler’s final words to “Atlas” in *The Gentle Art*: “It was our amusement to convict — they thought we cared to convince!”<sup>88</sup>

81 Whistler, *The Gentle Art*, p. 141.

82 Pound, *Pavannes and Divisions*, p. 102.

83 Leonard Doob, ed., “Ezra Pound Speaking”; *Radio Speeches of World War II* (Westport, Conn., 1978), p. 108.

84 Lewis, *Rude Assignment*, p. 216.

85 Pound attributes the saying to Whistler’s quarrel with Sir William Eden, which was a sort of reprise of the earlier landmark trial. See Doob, “Ezra Pound Speaking,” p. 196.

86 *Ibid.*, p. 187.

87 *Ibid.*, pp. 187 and 205. For Whistler’s version, see *The Gentle Art*, p. 51.

88 Whistler, *The Gentle Art*, p. 334.

Comments by artists and writers on the production of manifestos, though not exactly rare, are fairly unusual. The manifesto is often treated as a means to an end, an advertisement, and as a genre it has been undervalued in its short history. The “Notice to Public” in the second issue of *Blast* states: “this paper is run chiefly by Painters and for Painting, and they are only incidentally Propagandists, they do their work first, and, since they must, write about it afterwards.”<sup>89</sup> For Pound, who was not a visual artist, this reluctance to write about art may be considered part of Whistler’s legacy. In “The Serious Artist,” first published in the *Egoist* in 1913, he stated, “I take no great pleasure in writing prose about aesthetic. I think one work of art is worth forty prefaces and as many apologiae.”<sup>90</sup> Even on the subject of literature, Pound is strict: “Pay no attention to the criticism of men who have never themselves written a notable work.”<sup>91</sup> Yet in their references to Whistler, both Pound and Lewis paid tribute primarily to the combative style and artistic doctrine of *The Gentle Art*, ignoring his paintings and etchings almost completely. It has been my contention that Whistler served as the model for a certain type of modernist writer or artist in Britain, one for whom “making enemies,” rather than allegiances, was a primary objective; an artistic philosophy as well as a marketing strategy. The manifesto, in this view, is a central genre of British modernism. It is as much a performance — a threat, even a violent act — as it is a platform or a promissory note. That Whistler’s impact on Pound and Lewis has remained largely unexamined is not surprising, because his presence exists less in their modernist monuments (like *The Cantos*), than in their passing “blasts.” Added to this is the difficulty of analyzing associations across disciplines; but as the example of Whistler, Pound, and Lewis demonstrates, such an analysis can help to build connections in a broader genealogy of modernism.

89 Lewis, *Blast* 2, p. 7.

90 Pound, *Pavannes and Divisions*, p. 219.

91 *Ibid.*, p. 97.



# Butterfly Money: James McNeill Whistler as the Invisible Man

*Robert Slifkin*

H. G. Wells's 1897 novel *The Invisible Man* has been traditionally interpreted as a parable of the dangers of unregulated scientific experimentation or as a harbinger of the author's more mature socialist convictions. Yet it is also a scathing critique of the Aesthetic Movement and its doctrine of artistic autonomy, and more specifically, a satiric caricature of the public persona of James McNeill Whistler. Through latent symbolism and intertextual allusions, Wells relates his protagonist's principal trait to what he saw as the moral bankruptcy inherent in a purely formalist art — the kind championed by Whistler in his work and writings. Reading *The Invisible Man* as an anti-aesthetic allegory also sheds new light on Whistler's art and aesthetic theory, demonstrating in particular how the concept of invisibility is a defining motif in Whistler's mature artistic production.

The target of Wells's satire is first articulated in the striking image that adorned the cover of the first edition of the novel (fig. 16.1). Seated in a wicker chair, the bodiless figure wearing only a quilted smoking jacket and a pair of slippers presents an initial impression of the novel's anti-hero, whose dandyish deportment gives the first hint as to his aesthetic principles. To perceptive readers, the cover also visually alludes to Whistler's famous and often-exhibited portrait of Thomas Carlyle (fig. 10.2). A devotee of Carlyle's writings, Wells would have been sensitive to the ironic disjuncture between the philosopher's ethical code centered upon the virtue of hard work and Whistler's self-made mythology as an untaught genius who completed his paintings with no significant labor. The compositional correspondence to Whistler's portrait suggests both the true identity of the novel's title character and exposes Wells's own ideological attitude toward the protagonist.

Much of the evidence linking the Invisible Man (or to use the character's proper name, Griffin) to Whistler is associative, relating the two figures through shared characteristics. Yet halfway through the novel Wells divulges a more revealing identification through symbolic correspondence. After Griffin burglarizes a nearby house, a local paper reports the strange occurrence of a "vision of a fist-full of money ... traveling without visible agency."<sup>1</sup> This bobbing pecuniary bundle, one of the

1 H. G. Wells, *The Invisible Man* (New York, 1897), p. 122.



FIG. 10.1 Cover of *The Invisible Man*, London, 1897, Beinecke Rare Book and Manuscript Library, Yale University, New Haven.



FIG. 10.2 *Arrangement in Grey and Black, No. 2: Portrait of Thomas Carlyle*, 1872/73, Kelvingrove, ©Glasgow City Council; YMSM 137.

Verdict for plaintiff.

Damages one farthing.



FIG. 10.3 Illustration from *The Gentle Art of Making Enemies*, London, 1892.

most remarkable images of the entire book, is later described as “butterfly money,” a phrase that explicitly links the events to Whistler himself through the ubiquitous symbol that became his personal emblem and adorned much of his work. The artist had already depicted such a hybridization in his book *The Gentle Art of Making Enemies* (fig. 10.3) as a coda to his victory against Ruskin in court, when he received one farthing in damages.

The story of *The Invisible Man* begins with the arrival of Griffin at a small inn

located in Iping, in northwest Sussex, a region that was becoming a popular summer retreat for artists in the late nineteenth century. The aesthetic nature of Griffin's researches becomes evident when his belongings arrive from the train station. In an uncharacteristically long and vivid passage, Wells describes the contents of the Invisible Man's crates:

*Little fat bottles containing powders, small and slender bottles containing coloured and white fluids, fluted blue bottles labeled Poison, bottles with round bodies and slender necks, large green glass bottles, large white-glass bottles, bottles with glass stoppers and frosted labels, bottles with fine corks, bottles with bungs, bottles with wooden caps, wine bottles, salad oil bottles, — putting them in rows on the chiffonier, on the mantel, on the table under the window, round the floor, on the bookshelf, — everywhere.*<sup>2</sup>

Griffin's extensive bottle collection, carefully packed in straw and displayed throughout his room, is presented very similarly to a collection of art pottery and glass — a familiar pursuit of Aesthetes. Such collections were parodied in popular magazines like *Punch* and made famous in such Whistler paintings as *Purple and Rose: The Lange Leizen of the Six Marks* (1863/64, Philadelphia Museum of Art; YMSM 47), and by the artist's own renowned collection of blue-and-white pottery.

Throughout the early chapters of the book Griffin is chiefly seen in dimly lit areas and is repeatedly associated with dusk and shadowy light. Wells writes that Griffin "rarely went abroad by daylight, but at twilight he would go out muffled up invisibly ... and he chose the loneliest paths and those most overshadowed by trees and banks."<sup>3</sup> Like Whistler's prototypical artist evoked in his *Ten O'Clock* lecture, who is solely able to appreciate the time "when the evening mist clothes the riverside with poetry ... and the working man and the cultured one ... cease to understand,"<sup>4</sup> Griffin is a loner roaming the city in the "evening mist" and "dim sky," making even the villagers note his singular "taste for twilight."<sup>5</sup>

Wells discloses his own opinion of Griffin, and in turn Whistler, through the character of Marvel, a tramp Griffin meets on his escape from the Iping villagers. We first see Marvel sitting on the roadside testing his critical acumen in a moment of Heideggerian foreshadowing, appraising the aesthetic merits of two pairs of boots. Because of his higher sensitivity Marvel is the only character in the novel

<sup>2</sup> Ibid., p. 27.

<sup>3</sup> Ibid., pp. 33–34.

<sup>4</sup> Whistler, *The Gentle Art*, p. 144. R. A. M. Stevenson provided a similar description of Whistler in a review of his etchings: "He turns his back on many human associations; he cloisters himself from the everyday sights and feelings"; R. A. M. S.[tevenson], "Whistler," *Pall Mall Gazette* (December 11, 1895), p. 4.

<sup>5</sup> Wells, *The Invisible Man*, p. 37.

who understands the true nature of Griffin's invisibility, exclaiming (nearly) poetically in regard to Griffin's condition: "*Vox et* — what is it? Jabber."<sup>6</sup> The correct Latin phrase that Marvel cannot completely recall is *Vox et praeterea nihil*, taken from an allegory by Plutarch, which translates as "voice and nothing else" and exposes Griffin's essentially superficial nature.

Wells presents numerous references to the Aesthetic Movement as Griffin recounts his initial invisible escapades in London. While being chased by a crowd in an emporium, the Invisible Man smashes an "art pot" on the head of one of his pursuers, making a mass of pottery fall to the ground.<sup>7</sup> Here Griffin literalizes Ruskin's famous jab at Whistler for "flinging a pot of paint in the public's face."<sup>8</sup> Like Griffin's bottle collection in his laboratory, the art pottery is just one of the many apparently inconsequential Aesthetic details that populate the margins of the novel's narrative. Once in the streets of London, Griffin virtually takes the reader on a tour of the cultural centers of the city. First he passes Mudie's Library, from which a woman exits carrying "five or six yellow-labeled books."<sup>9</sup> Next he passes Bloomsbury Square, where he "intended to strike north past the Museum" only to run nearly head-on into an oncoming parade.<sup>10</sup> After an unsuccessful attempt at finding clothing at a department store, Griffin makes his way to Drury Lane, center of the theater district, where he finds a costumier's shop and is able to disguise his invisibility with a long coat, hat, false nose, and blue-tinted spectacles. During his first day of invisibility Griffin encounters the literary, dramatic, visual, and musical (counting the parade) elements of London, an extraordinary coincidence for a man of science, but understandable within Wells's aesthetic critique.

The novel is filled with many apparently marginal details that identify Griffin as a parody of Whistler and situate the entire narrative within the world of Aestheticism. To give a final example, Griffin's last action before being beaten to death by the angry mob of villagers is to fire a revolver, missing his intended target of one of his pursuers and hitting instead "a valuable Sidney Cooper."<sup>11</sup> Cooper was a British academic painter whose popular portrayals of sheep and cattle represented the type of literalist bourgeois art rejected by the Aesthetes. It seems then quite fitting (and quite comical considering the probable agrarian subject-matter of the painting) for

6 Ibid., p. 81.

7 Ibid., p. 205.

8 This remark was originally published in John Ruskin's *Fors Clavigera* and reprinted numerous times, including in *The Gentle Art*, p. 3.

9 Wells, *The Invisible Man*, p. 190.

10 Ibid., p. 190.

11 Ibid., p. 260.

Griffin's last attack to be upon a work of art, as if to say this was the target of the Invisible Man's "Reign of Terror" all along.

Reading *The Invisible Man* as an anti-Aesthetic allegory places it within a large and popular body of fiction from the 1890s. With the elitist dogmas of Aestheticism reaching mass popularity and the growing fear that such art might be a degenerate influence upon mankind, the movement and its practitioners became the target of much satire during the decade.<sup>12</sup> George du Maurier's hugely popular novel *Trilby* from 1894 set the precedent for the literary satire of Aestheticism and included (at least in its original serial publication) a thinly disguised characterization of Whistler in the character of Joe Sibley.<sup>13</sup>

Wells himself engaged explicitly in the genre in 1895 with a short story, "A Misunderstood Artist," in which he portrays a chef — or, as the self-important character describes himself, a "culinary artist" — who creates "some nocturnes in imitation of Mr. Whistler, with mushrooms, truffles, grilled meat, pickled walnuts, black pudding, French plums, porter — a dinner in soft velvety black."<sup>14</sup>

Recognizing Whistler as the Invisible Man not only adds to our understanding of Wells's novel, and the already large inventory of Whistler caricatures, but sheds new light on Whistler's art and aesthetics. Wells's decision to portray Whistler as invisible was far from arbitrary. In fact, I would like to argue that invisibility was the primary aesthetic factor in Whistler's mature artistic production.

The best example of Whistler's application of invisibility in his paintings is his series of so-called black portraits such as *Arrangement in Black: La Dame au brodequin jaune — Portrait of Lady Archibald Campbell* or *Arrangement in Black: Portrait of Senñor Pablo de Sarasate* (see fig. 8.2 and fig. 8.3). As full-length, lifesize portraits, these paintings present their sitters on a realistic scale but in a hazy, indeterminate manner with the figure and the background painted in similar dark tonalities so that the one seems to fuse into the other and thus almost completely disappears. Often painted in a dark studio and, according to the artist, best viewed in a similar environment, these paintings exemplify the polarity contained within Whistler's concept of "artistic vision," a phrase I would like to use to connote the subjectivity

12 For a good summary of Aesthetic parodies, see Lionel Lambourne, *The Aesthetic Movement* (London, 1996), pp. 112–33.

13 For the anti-Aesthetic component of the novel, see Jonathan H. Grossman, "The Mythic Svengali: Anti-Aestheticism in *Trilby*," *Studies in the Novel* 28 (Winter 1996), pp. 525–42.

14 H. G. Wells, "A Misunderstood Artist," *Pall Mall Gazette* (October 29, 1894), reprinted in *The Complete Short Stories of H. G. Wells* (London, 1998), pp. 737–41. Even earlier in his writing career, Wells published another short story about a painter who engages in a Faustian bargain for inspiration, only to discover at the tale's end that his tragic mistake was only a dream: "A Devotee of Art," *Science Schools Journal* (November–December 1888); reprinted in Wells, *The Complete Short Stories*, pp. 707–16. The story is noteworthy both for the relation between Aestheticism and immortality and for predating Wilde's *Dorian Gray* by two years.

inherent in not only these works' reception, but their production. I will return to this concept of artistic vision shortly after one brief example of the typical response to such paintings.

While it is certainly true that age has darkened many of these canvases so that they are probably less nuanced in their close tonalities than they originally appeared, many people who first saw these dark portraits found them frustratingly vague. Writing about Whistler's *Arrangement in Black, No. 8: Portrait of Mrs. Cassatt*, (1883–85, private collection; YMSM 250) the critic for the *Pall Mall Gazette* found it "peculiar . . . to Philistine eyes."<sup>15</sup> What was peculiar, or even invisible, to a set of philistine eyes could be simultaneously the apex of artistry to a viewer who had artistic vision. Herein lies the connection between Whistler's elitist aesthetic and invisibility — for Whistler's concept of invisibility was not universal, but rather depended upon the artistic sensitivity of the viewer.

Invisibility was a significant theme in Whistler's own writings about art. The artist begins a series of "Propositions" included in *The Gentle Art of Making Enemies* by stating that "A picture is finished when all trace of the means used to bring about the end has disappeared." Whistler's insistence on hiding any evidence of labor from the work of art, or as he put it, "efface the footsteps of work," combined his nonchalant bohemian pose with his austere and transparent aesthetic.<sup>16</sup> Yet this "elaborate game of hide and seek," as Elizabeth Broun has put it, served a greater purpose: as a sign, or, considering the exclusive nature of its signification, a shibboleth, representing artistic greatness.<sup>17</sup> An elitist perception, a concept of "artistic vision" in which only a select, artistically sensitive few were able to appreciate real art, was the cornerstone to Whistler's aesthetic theory.

According to the artist, because artistic vision was a gift only given to the creative elite, "bewilderment among painting is naturally the fate of the 'plain man.'"<sup>18</sup> The subjectivity of vision was proof of his aesthetic of artistic vision. Whistler went so far as to claim in a court of law during the Ruskin trial that what one of his nocturnes represented "depends upon who looks at it."<sup>19</sup> While the ostensible vagueness in his art was often related to a lack of substance or seriousness, Whistler paradoxically expected the uncultured masses to perceive his work as invisible. In the *Ten O'Clock* lecture he laments the situation where "people have acquired the habit of

15 "Mr. Whistler's New Arrangements," *Pall Mall Gazette* (December 8, 1885), p. 4.

16 Whistler, *The Gentle Art*, p. 115.

17 Elizabeth Broun, "'Thoughts That Began with the Gods': The Content of Whistler's Art," *Arts* 62 (October 1987), p. 37.

18 Whistler, *The Gentle Art*, p. 203.

19 *Ibid.*, p. 8.

looking, as who should say, not at a picture, but through it.”<sup>20</sup> For philistines looking “through” the work, the picture figuratively becomes invisible, so that what they see is not the work itself but what they have been conditioned to look for, namely narrative, sentiment, and anything obvious. Later in the same essay Whistler relates the critics’ inability to appreciate the subtle formal nature of works to subsequently invisible qualities of a masterpiece: “The great qualities, that distinguish the one work from the thousand, that make the masterpiece the thing of beauty that it is — have never been seen at all.”<sup>21</sup> As an artist intent on creating masterpieces of his own, it seems natural that he would follow the advice of his own pronouncements and imbue his works with such great-but-apparently-invisible qualities.

Through selectively culling and responding to primarily negative reviews, Whistler endeavored to create a public persona of a misunderstood and unappreciated bohemian. For the artist the fact that critics were unable to see the merit of his works was proof of their greatness. Like the “matter-of-fact”<sup>22</sup> residents of Iping who could not comprehend the existence of an invisible man, Whistler saw “the vast majority of English folk” as unable to “consider a picture as a picture, apart from any story which it may be supposed to tell.”<sup>23</sup>

This embattled attitude also shaped Whistler’s artistic output. The haziness and narrow tonal range of many of his paintings, the translucent figures that inhabit his nocturnes and portraits, and even his choice to specialize in crepuscular landscapes demonstrate how some of the most characteristic formal attributes of Whistler’s art can be read as attempts to make his work ostensibly difficult to a wide audience. In this sense, the “ambivalence with respect to visibility” that writers like Michael Fried have noted in Whistler’s oeuvre is not ambivalence at all, but an intentional formal trope expressing his aesthetic theory celebrating invisibility, or at least an exclusive visibility.<sup>24</sup> The inherent subjectivity of Whistler’s art, which demanded, in Fried’s words, “a new, more rarefied . . . relationship between painting and beholder” can be explained within the growing acknowledgment of the subjectivity of vision of the nineteenth century and in particular a dialectic of invisibility and avant-garde practice.<sup>25</sup> The delicately close tonalities of Whistler’s palette and the fading evening light that fell on his landscapes and portraits turned his works into testing grounds

20 Ibid., p. 138.

21 Ibid., p. 148.

22 Ibid., p. 67.

23 Ibid., p. 126.

24 Michael Fried, *Manet’s Modernism: or, The Face of Painting in the 1860s* (Chicago, 1996), p. 232. Fried notes that in certain of Whistler’s prints the artist allowed “foul biting” marks and X-shaped scrawls to frustrate the legibility of any prominent subject matter.

25 Ibid., p. 230.

for the aesthetic sensitivity of his audience. Within each image was either absolutely nothing or the essence of art, depending upon the personal scrutiny of the viewer.

Whistler's association with invisibility was even evident in the butterfly insignia with which he signed his paintings, beginning in the 1870s. Rather than painting a butterfly against the background of the painting, Whistler would sometimes depict a butterfly in the negative space created by an oval (see fig. 6.1). Whistler's "invisible" butterfly, which is initially difficult to make out as such, is the perfect emblem for the artist's aspiration of a subjective art whose effect depended upon the individual perception of the viewer.

In Whistler's 1884 portrait of the violin virtuoso Pablo de Sarasate y Navascuez (see fig. 8.3), the famous Spanish musician seems to vanish into the shadowy background of the painting so that all that one sees on first glance is Sarasate's face, white shirt and cuffs, and — the source of his own artistry — his hand and instrument. Writing to Sarasate, Whistler stated his hope to "convey ... your great artistic air" in the portrait.<sup>26</sup> For the painter, portraying his sitter as a sort of "invisible man" was in fact the ideal means to express visually his ineffable musical genius.

Whistler was aware of the visual duality of his black portraits, how their vagueness could become lifelike under the right conditions. As the artist Sidney Starr recalled, Whistler once showed him the portrait of Sarasate in a darkened studio from the distant vantage point at the end of a hallway exclaiming, "There he is, eh? Isn't that it, eh? ... See how he stands!"<sup>27</sup> This preternaturally Frankensteinian passage demonstrates how Whistler's black portraits were not only dependent upon the beholder's personal vision but even the conditions in which the work was shown. Speaking of his own creative process while painting these portraits Whistler plainly states how the darkness he chose to work in enables a sort of invisibility to emerge in the painting:

*As the light fades and the shadows deepen, all petty and exacting details vanish, everything trivial disappears, and I see things as they are in great strong masses: the buttons are lost, but the garment remains; the garment is lost, but the sitter remains; the sitter is lost, but the shadow remains; the shadow is lost, but the picture remains. And that night cannot efface from the painter's imagination.*<sup>28</sup>

By gradually occluding the material world — the kind of obvious details the mass of people would look for in a work of art — Whistler created works that intentionally hid their artistry (as well as their labor), making their secret content available to

26 Edgar Munhall, *Whistler and Montesquiou: The Butterfly and the Bat* (New York, 1995), p. 154.

27 *Ibid.*, p. 156.

28 Quoted in A. J. Eddy, *Recollections and Impression of James A. McNeill Whistler* (Philadelphia, 1903), p. 214.

those patient and open enough to discover it.

Aesthetic form was matched with analogous content in Whistler's portrait of Robert de Montesquiou from 1891/92 (see pl. 11). As the preeminent bard of French Aestheticism in the late nineteenth century, the poet was the ideal subject for a black painting. A friend and correspondent, he was aware of the divergent aims of invisibility in Whistler's art. After their first meeting in 1885, Montesquiou included a short poem in a letter to Whistler that emphasized how what was dark and mysterious in the painter's works was simultaneously bright and clear:

*Toute la clarté — tout le mystère  
Près de tout l'obscur — de tout le clair:  
C'est la loi de Ciel et de Terre  
Des créations du Dieu-Whistler.*<sup>29</sup>

This paradoxical duality of clarity and obscurity was noted by the critic Gustave Geffroy, who described the sensation of looking at the Montesquiou portrait as "vague at first, like an apparition, and so startling, so real."<sup>30</sup> That Montesquiou shared Whistler's concept of artistic vision is evident from another line of his verse, and one that returns my analysis back to Wells. In a review of the poet's 1895 collection *Le Parcours du Rêve au Souvenir* published in the *Saturday Review*, Montesquiou's phrase "impressions d'élite" is invoked three times by the anonymous critic as characteristic of the poet's desire to convey "a sense of local colour" in his verse. The critic uses the term to ridicule the poet's "pathetic" and "impotent" Aesthetic tendencies. For the reviewer, Montesquiou's "elite impressions" were actually bourgeois in their attempt to exalt banal experiences.<sup>31</sup>

Only two pages later in the same issue Wells published a review of Agnes Farrell's novel *Lady Lovan*, praising the work for its "genuine effort towards a criticism of life." Wells contrasts the author's socially conscious plot with the "multitudes who are writing absolutely aimless books, books full of dabs of *local colour* [my emphasis]."<sup>32</sup> In their shared invocation of local color, Wells and the anonymous critic of Montesquiou's poetry connect the apparent purposelessness of these works with the visual metaphor of local color. If, for Wells, local color suggested aimlessness, invisibility was the ultimate symbol of meaninglessness.

29 Reprinted in Munhall, *Whistler and Montesquiou*, p. 62.

30 G. Geffroy, "L'Exposition décanale de la peinture," *La Vie artistique*, vol. 1 (1901), p. 129, reprinted in Munhall, *Whistler and Montesquiou*, p. 161. In response to Swinburne's criticism of his *Ten O'Clock* lecture Whistler writes: "Because the Bard is blind, shall the Painter cease to see!" (*The Gentle Art*, p. 251). According to Whistler's aesthetic philosophy, the world was divided into the deaf and blind and those who could hear and see, so that the same work could signify opposite things for these two audiences.

31 "M. de Montesquiou's Verse," *Saturday Review* (November 9, 1895), p. 625.

32 H. G. Wells, "Fiction," *Saturday Review* (November 9, 1895), p. 627.

It is perhaps ironic that an antagonistic critic like Wells was able to discern the central tenet of Whistler's aesthetic theory. But as a writer who tried to infuse the world of science into his fiction, Wells occupied a unique position to observe the nexus between technology and aesthetic practice that was developing at the turn of the century and that informed Whistler's art. Recognizing Whistler as the Invisible Man not only places Wells's novel within the aesthetic debates of fin-de-siècle Europe and brings a new understanding of Whistler's art, but also adds to the burgeoning discourse on the history of visuality: it demonstrates the interconnectedness between avant-garde investigations of subjectivity and scientific rationalism. According to Jonathan Crary's history of visuality, the newly discovered inner self became the last frontier to be colonized within an increasingly administered and rationalized world.<sup>33</sup> While such attempts at managing subjective experience might initially appear the sole dominion of institutional forces like government and the marketplace, Whistler's appropriation of "artistic vision" demonstrates that artists were equally quick to adopt techniques to control subjective experience in their artistic production.

<sup>33</sup> Crary outlines the paradigmatic shift from a Cartesian, objective conception of vision to a more subjective one in his *Techniques of the Observer: On Vision and Modernity in the Nineteenth Century* (Cambridge, 1990).

# Getting Right with Whistler: An Artist and His Biographers

Daniel E. Sutherland

I begin with a confession: I am not an art historian; I am a social-cultural historian. Worse than that, I am a social-cultural historian turned biographer, which, I have come to learn, is not an entirely respectable breed. James Joyce called the biographer a “biografiend,” a sort of pursuing hound. Edmund Gosse declared, “The popular idea seems to be that no-one is too great a fool or too complete an amateur . . . to undertake the ‘life’ of an eminent person.” Yet, I have discovered that writing a biography is hard work. One historian has recently called it “an onerous genre,” and Lytton Strachey, the founder of “modern” biography, admitted, “It is perhaps as difficult to write a good life as to live one.”<sup>1</sup>

Telling the story of an artist may be hardest of all. The theoretical literature on biography agrees that successful biographers must do two things: explain the personality and character of their subject and place the person’s work or career — the thing that makes them worth writing about — in the context of the whole life. In the case of an artist, this means grappling not only with the eternally knotty problem of character but also with the creative process, with “how life feeds into art.” Yet the inspiration, motives, working techniques, even the finished products of an artist, particularly a painter, are not so easily understood, described, or explained as the working lives of other people — say of politicians, soldiers, even writers and poets. Visual artists — musicians, too — are elusive, even when they do not mean to be.<sup>2</sup>

Which brings us to Mr. Whistler (fig. 11.1), who meant to be enigmatic. The chameleon-like lad from Lowell was a mischievous fellow, with no intention of having his life or art dissected by academics and critics. One is reminded of a comment in Julian Barnes’s wonderful anti-biography, *Flaubert’s Parrot*: “What chance would the craftiest biographer stand against the subject who saw him coming and decided to amuse himself?”<sup>3</sup> Bernhard Sickert proposed that the principal difficulty in

1 Richard Holmes, “Biography: Inventing the Truth,” in John Batchelor, ed., *The Art of Literary Biography* (Oxford, 1995), pp. 15–26 (at p. 17); Edmund Gosse, “The Custom of Biography,” *Anglo-Saxon Review* 8 (March 1901), pp. 195–208 (at p. 205); Alastair Fowler, “Frolics with Oyster Wenches,” *Times Literary Supplement* (June 6, 2003), p. 11; Lytton Strachey, *Eminent Victorians* (1918; New York, 1933), p. viii.

2 Isabel Carlisle, “In Praise of a Deft Survivor,” *Times Literary Supplement* (April 4, 2003), p. 13; Morris Dickstein, “Literary Theory and Historical Understanding,” *Chronicle of Higher Education* (May 23, 2003), p. B10.

3 Julian Barnes, *Flaubert’s Parrot* (London, 1984), p. 38.



FIG. 11.1 Attributed to Mortimer Menpes, *James McNeill Whistler*, 1885, photogravure, Charles Lang Freer Papers, Freer Gallery of Art Archives, Smithsonian Institution, Washington, D.C.: Gift of Charles Lang Freer.

appraising Whistler's work was that he belonged to no artistic "school."<sup>4</sup> Similarly, the lack of some anchor or secure starting point confounds efforts to understand Whistler's character and life. His rootless wandering from boyhood to death, his eccentric behavior, and an aristocratic persona that belied his devotion to the art of the commonplace are only the most obvious obstacles confronting a biographer.

This is not to say that among the two dozen or so Whistler biographies from the past century there have not been some good efforts, but none of them has captured a completely integrated picture of the man and the artist. They all leave some doubt about the central issue confronting us: how did James Whistler become himself?<sup>5</sup> Admittedly, no biography is definitive. New evidence,

new perspectives, new historical concerns will always require reexamination of published work. But if we want to get right with Whistler, that is, to explain his life as fully as we might, we should begin by appreciating the perils that await us. With that object in mind, a review of some of the best-known Whistler biographies can be instructive.

In the beginning were the Pennells, who offered, in 1908, the first comprehensive review of the artist's life and work. The Pennells were handicapped—as they never tired of reminding people—by the refusal of Rosalind Birnie Philip, Whistler's sister-in-law and executrix, to let them quote from Whistler's unpublished correspondence. Still, they had Whistler's own reminiscences, derived from many conversations with him in the last few years of his life, and with his passing, they

4 Bernhard Sickert, *Whistler* (London, 1908), p. 1.

5 The "central issue" is taken from Adrian Frazier, *George Moore, 1852–1933* (New Haven, Conn., 2000), p. xvii.

solicited the recollections of scores of people who had known him. They also collected through gift or purchase every letter by or to Whistler that they could locate. From this material, they established a chronology of Whistler's life, explained his actions, explored his personality, described his artistic techniques and methods, and passed aesthetic judgments on his work. It was a significant achievement.<sup>6</sup>

Still, we have good reason to be unhappy with the Pennells. They were neither biographers nor historians, but art critics, journalists, and friends of Whistler. They had been promoting his work for years, long before Whistler's death in 1903, a fact that the artist himself understood and exploited. Their biography was born of a determination to defend and enhance his reputation. The stodgy, two-volume chronicle, typical of amateur Victorian biography, was no impartial history but a hymn of praise to a man they admired. That may sound harmless enough, but the Pennells' often misguided work influenced subsequent biographers and the image and reputation of Whistler for decades to come. Even today, biographers and historians work largely within the intellectual framework they created. Most notably, the Pennells distorted Whistler's artistic legacy — and with it, his entire life — by depicting him as an isolated American genius who single-handedly battled the artistic establishment to change the course of Western art.<sup>7</sup>

Equally worrisome, the Pennells manipulated their sources in fashioning this "memorial," as Elizabeth Pennell described it, to Whistler.<sup>8</sup> They sometimes changed words or context when quoting from sources, ignored uncomfortable facts and evidence, inserted ellipses that could alter the meaning of a quotation, even manufactured quotations.<sup>9</sup> They concealed information about Whistler's racial attitudes, youthful drinking sprees, and quarrels with friends.<sup>10</sup> The same flaws marred other Pennell books about Whistler, most notably their 1921 *Whistler Journal*. Presented

6 Pennell, *Life*.

7 For Walter Sickert's perceptive 1908 review in the *Fortnightly Review* see Anna Gruetzner Robins, ed., *Walter Sickert: The Complete Writings* (Oxford, 2000), pp. 178–88. For scholarly commentary on the Pennells as biographers see Lynne Bell, "Fact and Fiction: James McNeill Whistler's Critical Reputation in England, 1880–1892," Ph.D. diss., University of East Anglia, 1987, pp. x–xviii; Meaghan Clarke, *Critical Voices: Women and Art Criticism in Britain, 1880–1905* (Aldershot, 2005), pp. 141–47.

8 Elizabeth R. Pennell diaries, November 18, 1903, Joseph and Elizabeth R. Pennell Papers, Harry Ransom Humanities Research Center, University of Texas, Austin.

9 Compare Cicely (Alexander) Spring-Rice to Joseph Pennell, September 9 [1906], vol. 300 and Sidney Colvin to Elizabeth Pennell, September 5, 1906, vol. 281, PWC, to Pennell, *Life*, vol. 1, pp. 173–74 and vol. 2, p. 43; compare Elizabeth R. Pennell diaries, July 15, 1899, September 29, and November 13, 1900, Pennell Papers, to Pennell, *Life*, vol. 2, pp. 212, 258, 261.

10 I. B. Davenport interview, p. 7, Box S, folder 8; C. W. Larned to Joseph Pennell, September 14 and 25, and October 4, 1906, vol. 279, and Archibald M. Butt to Joseph and Elizabeth Pennell, February 27, 1912, vol. 303; William Rossetti to Joseph Pennell, November 6, 1906, vol. 278, and Thomas Armstrong to Joseph Pennell, November 9, 1906, vol. 298, all in PWC.

as a transcription of their private diaries, the majority of the quotations attributed to Whistler in the latter work were, in fact, originally recorded only as paraphrases or summaries of his words. In some cases, the Pennells altered even authentic quotations, including Whistler's famous denial of having been born in Lowell, for both the *Journal* and the biography.<sup>11</sup> Other quotations took different forms in the two books.<sup>12</sup> In other words, aspiring Whistler biographers should consult the raw data collected by the Pennells, nearly all of it available at the Library of Congress and University of Texas, before accepting the couple's published assertions and interpretations.

More reliable is James Laver's 1930 biography, revised in 1951. Laver was a poet, novelist, and popular writer on art and costume rather than a biographer; but his slender volume strikes a nice balance between describing Whistler's life and discussing his work. This was no mean feat. The tendency of Whistler biographers to let his colorful private life overshadow his work has been the most frequently cited criticism of their efforts, especially by art historians. Yet Laver's interpretation satisfied many people who had known Whistler. Laver believed that the key to understanding Whistler's art, both painting and etching, was its "simplicity," by which he meant Whistler's preference for silhouettes over modeled figures, his limited palette, his uncluttered style of exhibition, and his ability to escape the artistic conventions of his day. Laver did not think Whistler was an untutored genius or the greatest artist of his generation. He demonstrated how Whistler had been influenced by the artists and movements of his time. He recognized something else, too: "Women exercised a profound effect on the life and art of Whistler," Laver insisted; "their companionship was one of the first needs of his nature." Laver credited women with providing the "unique quality of the world he created" and attributed much of the simplicity of that artistic world, its "subtle" nature, to a "feminine" element in Whistler's own character.<sup>13</sup>

Nonetheless, Laver, who never intended to write a full biography, failed to plumb Whistler's character as deftly as he did the art. He provided insights, but not a life portrait, and even some of his insights were aborted. For example, Laver was on to something when he emphasized Whistler's feminine sensibilities, but biographers and historians since his time have pursued this dimension with far more sophistication, as witnessed by recent exhibitions at the Frick Collection and Hunterian Art

11 Compare Pennell, *Whistler Journal*, pp. 277–78, and Pennell, *Life*, vol. 1, pp. 1–2, to Elizabeth R. Pennell diaries, February 26, 1903, Pennell Papers.

12 See, as examples, Pennell, *Life*, vol. 2, p. 209, and Pennell, *Whistler Journal*, p. 41; *Life*, vol. 2, p. 258, and *Whistler Journal*, pp. 190–91; *Life*, vol. 2, p. 261, and *Whistler Journal*, p. 201.

13 William Rothenstein to James Laver, November 13, 1930, James Laver Papers, GUL; James Laver, *Whistler* (1930; London, 1951), pp. 10, 62, 99, 116–18, 143–44, 167, 234. For Laver's experiences in writing about Whistler, see his autobiography, *Museum Piece, or the End of an Iconographer* (London, 1963), pp. 123–24, 214–15.

Gallery. Naturally, we need to be careful about defining human qualities, such as “subtlety,” in terms of gender, but interest in this feminine influence is a good example of how new historical concerns often necessitate new biographies. Similarly, art historians have recently paid more attention to the role of social class in defining Whistler’s life and work.<sup>14</sup>

Such issues never bothered the always entertaining actor-director-writer Hesketh Pearson. Conceding the soundness of Laver’s analysis of Whistler’s art and aesthetic theories, Pearson set out to explain in his 1952 biography the artist’s personality and character. He divided Whistler’s life into fourteen roughly chronological phases of personal development, defined by such chapter titles as “Bohemian,” “Bourgeois,” “Oriental,” “Temperamental,” and “Despotic.” The result has some useful sections, but its amateur psychology is often contradictory and generally simplistic. For example, Pearson proposed that Whistler painted in order to create his own reality. This is a doubtful premise to begin with, and Pearson’s explanations for why Whistler wished to create his own world seem just as questionable. At one point he maintained, “[Whistler] had the lesser artist’s dread of imperfection, which derives from a fear of reality, a shrinking from the imperfection of life.” Exactly what Whistler feared, or how painting could compensate for life’s imperfections, remain murky concepts in Pearson’s interpretation.<sup>15</sup>

Then, too, there is always the question of how Pearson defined biography. He was not inexperienced in the genre, having previously written lives of Charles Dickens, Benjamin Disraeli, and Oscar Wilde. However, Pearson endorsed a school of biography that discounted the possibility of achieving “truth” in historical writing. Biographers, he believed, could render only an “imaginative portrait” of their subjects. “No artist worth his salt is concerned with accuracy of detail if it doesn’t happen to suit his purpose,” Pearson insisted. The best biography, he expounded, was “not the one that contains the greater number of incontrovertible facts, but the one that paints the more living picture.”<sup>16</sup> Whistler would have agreed with these sentiments as they applied to painting, but he most certainly would have wished his biographer

14 MacDonald and Galassi; Pamela Robertson, *Beauty and the Butterfly: Whistler’s Depictions of Women* (Hunterian Art Gallery, Glasgow, 2003); “New Directions in Whistler Studies,” panel at College Art Association Annual Conference, February 19–22, 2003; Robin Spencer, “Whistler’s Early Relations with Britain and the Significance of Industry and Commerce for His Art: Part I,” *Burlington Magazine* 136 (April 1994), pp. 212–24, and “Whistler’s Early Relations with Britain and the Significance of Industry and Commerce for His Art: Part II,” *Burlington Magazine* 136 (October 1994), pp. 664–74; Andrew Stephenson, “Refashioning Modern Masculinity: Whistler, Aestheticism and National Identity,” in David Peters Corbett and Lara Perry, eds., *English Art, 1860–1914: Modern Artists and Identity* (Manchester, 2000), pp. 133–49.

15 Hesketh Pearson, *The Man Whistler* (1952; New York, 1978), pp. 28, 49, 95, 117, 126.

16 Quoted in David Novarr, *The Lines of Life: Theories of Biography, 1880–1970* (West Lafayette, Ind., 1986), pp. 66–70.

to get things straight. Granted, there is a larger truth in Pearson's philosophy, but his approach also implies a worrisome justification for playing fast and loose with the facts, which he was inclined to do if they got in the way of a good story.

Pearson also refused to let chronology slow him down, although, on this score, he had some impressive company among biographers in the post-World War II era. Leon Edel, for example, the biographer of American writer (and Whistler acquaintance) Henry James, declared, "Biography can violate chronology without doing violence to truth."<sup>17</sup> It was in this spirit that Pearson offered his descriptive chapter headings ("Bohemian," and so on), rather than an explicit chronological division of Whistler's life. But while this arrangement may have facilitated exploration of Whistler's personality, it obscured, even threatened, any useful discussion of his work. Pearson referred to events and used statements decades apart to buttress his interpretations, quoting Whistler in the 1890s to make a point about his work in the 1870s, for example. Such compressions of time took no account of transitions and growth in Whistler's thinking during the intervening years.

Both Laver and Pearson had been largely forgotten by the 1970s, when Stanley Weintraub and Gordon Fleming became the first Americans since the Pennells to tackle Whistler in serious fashion. They were also the first academics to do so. Weintraub, a professor of history, had already published a biography of Queen Victoria when his *Whistler: A Biography* appeared in 1974, and he went on to write about several other prominent Victorians. His *Whistler* received rave reviews in the popular press and immediately eclipsed a pedestrian account of the artist's life published by Roy McMullen, another American, the previous year. Utilizing the substantial scholarly literature on Whistler that had appeared in the preceding half-century, Weintraub provided the fullest, most detailed account to that time of Whistler's life. His discussion of Whistler's art fell short of Laver's analysis, but he integrated the life and the art more thoroughly than previous biographers.<sup>18</sup>

However, Weintraub did not progress very far beyond the Pennells in his interpretations. He told the same old stories and anecdotes, many of them in the same old way—as long, undigested quotations. He did pay slightly more attention to the implications of social class and women in Whistler's life (if superficially), but he failed to recognize the close family ties between Whistler, brother William, and step-sister Deborah. Weintraub also continued, as had all previous biographers save Laver, to cast Whistler as an isolated genius. He titled his first chapter "Born in Exile," an exile, at least intellectually, from which Whistler never returned. Indeed,

17 Leon Edel, *Literary Biography* (Toronto, 1957), p. 99; Pearson, *The Man Whistler*, p. 34.

18 Stanley Weintraub, *Whistler: A Biography* (1974; New York, 2000); Roy McMullen, *Victorian Outsider: A Biography of J. A. M. Whistler* (New York, 1973).

his Whistler was somewhat darker, more alienated, and more needlessly belligerent than earlier Whistlers.

All of which points to the overarching problem in Weintraub's account: his failure to explain the contours of Whistler's life and work. His cursory survey of the artistic influences on Whistler provides the most obvious example, but he also failed to explore such landmarks in Whistler's life as his move from France to England in 1859, his relationships with Joanna Hiffernan and Maud Franklin, his reasons for breaking with those two women, and his apparent transformation from congenial bon vivant into pugnacious provocateur. Weintraub did discuss Whistler's original rush to Paris as a young man, in 1855, but he endorsed the old, and still unproved, assertion that Whistler was drawn there after reading Henri Murger's *Scènes de la vie bohème*. Some of Weintraub's artistic judgments were also shaky. For example, he asserted that Whistler resorted to painting the nocturnes because he had failed to master classical forms in his Six Projects (see 2. *Framing Whistler's Nudes*, p. 25). While there is an element of truth in this view, it slights the complexity of Whistler's artistic transition. Weintraub called the nocturnes "deliberate experiments in painting the night" and concluded that Whistler embraced the night because "[d]arkness needed no figures, but yielded up its own." To document this poetic but faulty analysis, Weintraub depended on a Whistler conversation from the 1890s, a chronological fudging reminiscent of Pearson.<sup>19</sup>

Gordon Fleming, a professor of English, contributed to the canon in 1978 with *The Young Whistler*, which traces the artist's life up to his return to England from Valparaiso, in late 1866. Fleming made more extensive use of Anna Whistler's Russian diary than previous biographers, and he provided new information about Whistler's American years, especially at West Point, Baltimore, and Washington, D.C., and his student days in Paris. He even discussed some of the earliest artistic influences on Whistler, including several Russians.<sup>20</sup>

Unfortunately, Fleming demonstrated a troubling tendency: an almost dogged determination to stretch his evidence. This produced some highly speculative assertions. For example, after assuming that young James visited the Hermitage during his residence in St. Petersburg (speculative but not unreasonable), Fleming suggested that on this visit Whistler "could hardly have missed the first objects to strike his eye, Aert van der Neer's nocturnal seascapes." To imply that Whistler was somehow

19 Weintraub, *Whistler*, pp. 33, 135. More satisfying discussions of the nocturnes are offered by Robin Spencer, "Whistler, Swinburne and Art for Art's Sake," in Elizabeth Prettejohn, ed., *After the Pre-Raphaelites: Art and Aestheticism in Victorian England* (Manchester, 1999), pp. 59–89; and John Siewert, "Rhetoric and Reputation in Whistler's Nocturnes," in Merrill, *After Whistler*, pp. 64–73.

20 Gordon Fleming, *The Young Whistler, 1834–66* (London, 1978).

influenced by this speculative encounter with van der Neer when developing his own nocturnes, twenty years on, stretches both the sources and the imagination. And while Fleming deserves credit for being the first Whistler biographer to identify his sources with endnotes, his references were frustratingly vague, especially when it came to dates.<sup>21</sup>

In another instance, Fleming submitted that Whistler purposely flunked out of West Point by exceeding the number of demerits allowed a cadet for breaking regulations. He explained this seemingly self-destructive course by saying Whistler “probably” feared graduating, lest he spend the rest of his career as an engineer being compared unfavorably to his father. Consequently, the son ran amok. Evidence of his design, Fleming contended, was the fact that Whistler could control his conduct, thus avoiding needless demerits, whenever he chose to do so. For example, a timely visit with his mother at Scarsdale, New York, in 1852 persuaded the young man to conform to regulations long enough to avoid expulsion in that academic year.<sup>22</sup>

In this last instance, cadet medical records show that Whistler was saved not by a spurt of maternally inspired self-discipline but because he was too ill that year to have compiled an unacceptable number of demerits. First, before returning to West Point from his visit with Anna, the eighteen-year-old Whistler contracted gonorrhea (one of only eleven in 362 cadets to contract either gonorrhea or syphilis during his three years at West Point). Doctors at the cadet hospital diagnosed his ailment on October 13, ten days after his return to the academy. It is unclear when Whistler returned to duty, but he did not receive another demerit until November 11, a month later, which was the usual recovery time for his infection. He then missed nearly seventy days of duty from December through May due to respiratory congestion and rheumatism. The bout of rheumatism was so bad that Whistler returned home to recuperate through the summer.<sup>23</sup>

Fleming published a full biography of Whistler in 1991, but it fell flat, challenged in any event three years later by a far better researched and more thoughtful Whistler biography. Ronald Anderson and Anne Koval, an art dealer and professor of art history, respectively, balanced the story of Whistler’s life with a careful analysis of his art. They revealed much about his professional and personal contacts with other painters, both French and British. They broadened understanding of his relationships with the mistress muses and his wife, Beatrix, introduced information

21 *Ibid.*, p. 51. Examples of vague references are Chapter 7, n. 49, Chapter 8, n. 20, Chapter 10, n. 4, 5.

22 *Ibid.*, pp. 85, 94–95, 98–99, 104.

23 Register of Delinquencies, 1851–53, September 1852–May 1853, Records of U.S. Military Academy, National Archives Record Group 404, Special Collections, U.S. Military Academy, West Point, N.Y.; Post (Cadet) Hospital Records, U.S. Military Academy, Field Hospitals, N.Y., vol. 608, pp. 35, 42, 46, 48, 51, 56, 58–59, Adjutant General’s Records, Record Group 94, National Archives, Washington, D.C.

about his revolutionary political leanings, and provided a new way of looking at the mysterious trip to Chile. They labored, particularly, to puncture the many myths about Whistler created by himself, his friends, and historians.<sup>24</sup>

Yet, for all their admirable efforts, Anderson and Koval, like earlier biographers, tended to describe the visible Whistler, defined by his published words and reactions to public events. They skillfully dismantled much of the “public myth” surrounding him, but they paid less attention to what biographers call “covert myth.” Public myth is the image that each of us purposely projects to the rest of the world, the person we wish other people to see. Covert myth—or “the mask of life”—is our inner self, our private dreams, fears, anxieties, and ambitions, the essence of the private person that the public myth disguises. Anderson and Koval correctly identified vanity, insecurity, and mistrust as keys to understanding Whistler’s contradictory and inconsistent public actions, but they did so, as one reviewer put it, without plumbing his emotional depths or “decoding the inner life.” If they lifted him above the caricature of many earlier biographers, they also fell short of a carefully nuanced portrait. Necessarily, then, they must also have missed some part of Whistler’s artistic vision and motivations.<sup>25</sup>

While no Whistler biographies have been published since 1994, the intervening years have produced a startling amount of scholarship on his work and influence. The number of new books and exhibitions (not to mention articles, essays, and dissertations) very nearly constitutes a Whistler renaissance. Several authors have placed Whistler in a broader historical context. Sarah Burns, for instance, has explored the making of his public persona and marketing of his work. David Park Curry has examined the intersection of Whistler’s aesthetic sense and the “modernism” of the nineteenth-century commercial art world. David Peters Corbett, inspecting Whistler’s contribution to a new painting aesthetic in the 1860s, has grouped him with Albert Moore, Frederic Leighton, and G. F. Watts. Even Michael Fried, in a reevaluation of Edouard Manet’s work, has discussed Whistler as part of the “Generation of 1863,” alongside Manet, Henri Fantin-Latour, and Alphonse Legros.<sup>26</sup> Valuable new work on Whistler and *japonisme*, Whistler and Montesquiou,

24 G. H. Fleming, *James Abbott McNeill Whistler: A Life* (Adlestrop, Glos., UK, 1991); *New York Review of Books* (August 1, 1991), p. 20; Anderson and Koval.

25 Leon Edel, *Writing Lives: Principia Biographica* (New York, 1984), pp. 160–62; Avis Berman, “Yankee Doodle Dandy,” *Boston Book Review* (October 1, 1995). See, too, the review by Elizabeth Prettejohn, “Locked in the Myth,” *Art History* 19 (June 1996), pp. 301–307; and Patricia Mainardi, “Repetition and Novelty: Exhibitions Tell Tales,” in Charles W. Haxthausen, ed., *The Two Art Histories: The Museum and the University* (New Haven, 2003), pp. 81–86.

26 Burns; David Park Curry, *James McNeill Whistler: Uneasy Pieces* (Richmond, Va., 2004); David Peters Corbett, *The World in Paint: Modern Art and Visuality in England, 1848–1914* (University Park, Penn., 2004); Michael Fried, *Manet’s Modernism, or, The Face of Painting in the 1860s* (Chicago, 1996).

Whistler and Symbolism, Whistler and Realism, Whistler and Impressionism, Whistler and interior design, Whistler in Venice, Whistler in Holland, the *Peacock Room*, and the *Mother* has also expanded the Whistler story.<sup>27</sup> Some of this has been published to coincide with important exhibitions of Whistler's work. Other volumes, tied more specifically to new exhibitions, have partnered him with such profoundly different artists as John Singer Sargent, Philip Wilson Steer, J. M. W. Turner, Claude Monet, Edgar Degas, Walter Sickert, Henri Toulouse-Lautrec, and the Pre-Raphaelites. Scholars have explored the connections between Whistler and fashion, Whistler and women, Whistler in Paris, Whistler's ties to Russia, his influence on American artists, and the influence on him of such masters as Velázquez.<sup>28</sup> New or revised catalogues have been published for his drawings, pastels, watercolors, and lithographs, and one is being prepared for the etchings.<sup>29</sup>

In other words, the next Whistler biographer has an abundance — nearly an embarrassment — of riches with which to work. Indeed, such a wealth of new scholarship very nearly requires a new biography, one that will explore parts of Whistler's life, address artistic issues, and consider interpretations that had not even occurred to earlier biographers. But it will not be easy. With no end to the current renaissance in sight, and with most of Whistler's known correspondence transcribed, annotated, and readily available on the internet, the new challenge will be to absorb and

27 Examples of this renaissance not already cited include Carole McNamara and John Siewert, *Whistler: Prosaic Views, Poetic Visions* (New York, 1994); Dormont and MacDonald; Deanna Marohn Bendix, *Diabolical Designs: Paintings, Interiors, and Exhibitions of James McNeill Whistler* (Washington, D.C., 1995); Edgar Munhall, *Whistler and Montesquieu: The Butterfly and the Bat* (New York, 1995); Susan P. Casteras and Colleen Denny, eds., *The Grosvenor Gallery: A Palace of Art in Victorian England* (New Haven, Conn., 1996); Andrew Wilton and Robert Upstone, eds., *The Age of Rossetti, Burne-Jones, and Watts: Symbolism in Britain, 1860–1910* (Paris, 1997); Merrill, *Peacock Room*; J. F. Heijbroek and Margaret F. MacDonald, *Whistler and Holland* (Amsterdam, 2000); Alastair Grieve, *Whistler's Venice* (New Haven, Conn., 2000); Margaret F. MacDonald, *Palaces in the Night: Whistler in Venice* (Berkeley, Calif., 2001); Eric Denker, *Whistler and His Circle in Venice* (London, 2003); Ayako Ono, *Japonisme in Britain: A Source of Inspiration* (New York, 2003); Margaret F. MacDonald, ed., *Whistler's Mother: An American Icon* (Aldershot, Hants., UK, 2003); Sarah Walden, *Whistler and His Mother: An Unexpected Relationship* (London, 2003).

28 H. Barbara Weinberg, Doreen Bolger, and David Park Curry, *American Impressionism and Realism: The Painting of Modern Life, 1885–1915* (New York, 1994); Wendy Baron et al., *Whistler and Sickert* (Madrid, 1998); Martha Tedeschi and Britt Salvesen, *Songs of Stone: James McNeill Whistler and the Art of Lithography* (Chicago, 1998); Valerie Greenfield Thompson et al., *James McNeill Whistler: The Venetian Etchings* (London, 2001); David Fraser Jenkins and Avis Berman, *Impressionists in London: Whistler, Sargent, and Steer* (Nashville, 2002); Gary Tinterow et al., *Manet/Velázquez: The French Taste for Spanish Painting* (New Haven, Conn., 2003); Peter Black, *Copper into Gold: Whistler and 19th-Century Printmaking* (Glasgow, 2003); Kenneth John Myers, *Mr. Whistler's Gallery: Pictures at an 1884 Exhibition* (Washington, D.C., 2003); Lochnan, *Turner Whistler Monet*; Allen Staley and Christopher Newall, *Pre-Raphaelite Vision: Truth to Nature* (London, 2004); Anna Gruetzner Robins and Richard Thomson, *Degas, Sickert and Toulouse-Lautrec: London and Paris, 1870–1910* (London, 2005); Kathleen Adler et al., *Americans in Paris, 1860–1900* (New Haven, Conn., 2006); Galina Andreeva and Margaret F. MacDonald, eds., *Whistler and Russia* (Moscow, 2006).

29 M; C; Margaret F. MacDonald et al., eds., *James McNeill Whistler: The Etchings: A Catalogue Raisonné*, <http://etchings.arts.gla.ac.uk/>

make sense of so much information. And the same pesky questions remain to be answered: How do we explain this complex man? How do we account for his artistic mastery? How does one get “inside” a person so emotionally and psychologically “closed?” How does a biographer “get right” with someone who lived “mostly on the surface,” as Whistler tended to do, almost in defiance of being understood? The task is especially thorny with a subject who delighted in befuddling people, playing tricks on them, intentionally misleading them, and, on occasion, just plain lying.<sup>30</sup>

With no pretense of knowing all the answers or of presenting a foolproof plan of attack, I present here a few suggestions that might help the next generation of biographers. First, do not dismiss the public “myth” or image of Whistler as an obstacle to understanding him. Rather, embrace it, or at least some of it. In their desire to go “beyond the myth,” Anderson and Koval did not always distinguish between those parts created by Whistler’s contemporaries and the part he consciously shaped for himself. The latter is crucial for understanding him. Sarah Burns and David Curry have suggested ways to exploit this image, and as one savvy biographer has emphasized, “the lies we tell are part of the truth we live.”<sup>31</sup> Insofar as the myth is partly Whistler’s own invention, meant to promote the person he wished people to see, it tells us much about the real Whistler.

Second, we should recognize that the biggest myth about Whistler may be his famed inscrutability. He was complicated, without doubt, but two elements most defined his life: absolute devotion to his art and a determination to take little other than his art (which he largely equated with personal honor) terribly seriously. All else, at least in his adult years, seems related to these two facts. So if, as James Laver contended, simplicity is the key to understanding Whistler’s art, perhaps we would find it easier to penetrate both the art and the inner mask if we interpreted his actions and statements—both public and private—as expressions of this single-mindedness. Perhaps we have been too intimidated by Whistler’s undoubted “genius.” We cower like the biographer of George Eliot who, after considering his subject’s formidable intellect and accomplishments, confessed, “[S]he knew a lot more than I did.” In seeking to run Whistler to ground, we must not out-fox ourselves and over-interpret either the man or the artist.<sup>32</sup>

It is also true, to make a third point, that some parts of Whistler’s life appear complex or mysterious only because we still know too little about them. We are far

30 Martin Levin, “Songwriter on the Surface,” *Times Literary Supplement* (March 7, 2003), p. 9.

31 Michael Holroyd, *Works on Paper: The Craft of Biography and Autobiography* (Boston, 2001), p. 19.

32 Frederick R. Karl, “Writing George Eliot’s Biography,” *Biography* 22 (Winter 1999), p. 82. For a broader discussion of the “genius” factor in biography, see Laura Marcus, *Auto/biographical Discourses: Criticism, Theory, Practice* (Manchester, 1994), pp. 56–58.

better informed about his work and much of his public life than we were a decade ago. We may even have gotten to the bottom of the inexplicable South American sojourn.<sup>33</sup> But other parts of his story remain incomplete. For instance, the first twenty-one years of Whistler's life — a crucial time for anyone's development — have not been satisfactorily explored. We have relied mostly on the Pennells and Gordon Fleming for our knowledge of his youth, and, as I have suggested, their interpretations leave many factual and interpretive gaps. Then, too, we have yet to untangle Whistler's extraordinarily jumbled personal heritage and cultural identity. His family's military tradition, the Celtic lineage, his father's early death, the American — and more specifically Southern — roots, a deeply romantic strain, the French influence, and his broad cosmopolitanism shaped the quirky contours of Whistler's entire life in ways not yet fully understood.

As a fourth consideration, it seems that much of our confusion about Whistler, the tendency to exaggerate his complexity and the capacity of the public myth to obscure his artistic achievements, has been exacerbated by the heavy reliance of past biographers on the reminiscences and memoirs of his contemporaries. This touches on the most difficult yet fundamental issue confronting a biographer: perspective. From whose point of view should one tell the story of a person's life? From the subject's point of view? From that of friends and contemporaries? How much knowledge of the whole life should a biographer betray in explaining any single portion of it? How much hindsight should be allowed? Aspiring Whistler biographers would do well to tell his story as it unfolded, and to rely principally on Whistler's own writings: his correspondence, accounts, ledgers, and other private papers. Patricia de Montfort has spotted an autobiographical tendency even in such vital parts of the public Whistler as *The Gentle Art of Making Enemies* and the *Ten O'Clock* lecture. Surely, then, we can coax similar self-revelations from private words and actions.<sup>34</sup>

This last suggestion is not meant to exclude the outsider's view, or even to banish all retrospective assessments of Whistler's character and work. Henry Adams, for example, made a telling yet seldom considered observation in his famous *Education*. Whistler, he said, was willing "to seem eccentric where no real eccentricity, unless of temper, existed." There was a "vehemence" in Whistler's public postures,

33 Daniel E. Sutherland, "James McNeill Whistler in Chile: Portrait of the Artist as Arms Dealer," *American Nineteenth Century History* 9 (March 2008), pp. 62–73.

34 Victoria Glendinning, "Lies and Silences," and Robert Blake, "The Art of Biography," both in Eric Homberger and John Charmley, eds., *Troubled Face of Biography* (New York, 1988), pp. 49–51, 88–90; Patricia de Montfort, "'The Gentle Art': An Artistic Autobiography?" *Whistler Review* 1 (1999), pp. 37–44, "James McNeill Whistler: The Ten O'Clock Lecture," M.Litt. thesis, University of St. Andrews, 1990, and "'The Fiction of My Own Biography': Whistler and The Gentle Art of Making Enemies," Ph.D. diss., University of St. Andrews, 1994; Julie F. Codell, *The Victorian Artist: Artists' Lifewritings in Britain, c.1870–1910* (Cambridge, 2003), pp. 168–71.

Adams contended, that he “never betrayed in his painting.”<sup>35</sup> Such insights are valuable. Yet, as with Whistler himself, the biographer should look more to the private writings of his contemporaries, to letters and diaries written during Whistler’s lifetime. Thankfully, there seems to be a trend in this direction, but scholars have still extracted surprisingly little information about Whistler from these sources.

Finally, we need to know more about the people around Whistler for their own sakes. Thomas Carlyle, himself the subject of one of Whistler’s greatest portraits, insisted that “history is the essence of innumerable biographies.” The same could be said of biography. Certainly, in order to understand Whistler, we must appreciate how his art was shaped and influenced by the people around him. It has been said that all great artists are borrowers, and Anderson and Koval have demonstrated conclusively that Whistler was not the isolated genius of legend. Indeed, many of the essays included in this volume expand our understanding of the many social and artistic networks in which he operated. Whistler was extraordinarily impressionable throughout his life, in some ways naive and immature, both artistically and personally. He could be easily seduced by the ideas, suggestions, and perspectives of friends: Gustave Courbet and Fantin in the late 1850s, for instance, or D. G. Rossetti, Algernon Swinburne, and Albert Moore in the 1860s. Yet — and here is where any analysis of Whistler takes a wicked turn — he just as readily shed or transformed ideas and perspectives that did not suit his instincts and purposes. As the always perceptive James Laver put it, “Few artists have absorbed so many influences and remained so completely themselves.”<sup>36</sup>

Here, then, is the source of Whistler’s genius, his legacy, and, quite possibly, the biographer’s salvation. While working within the same artistic and intellectual framework as his contemporaries, Whistler could, in modern parlance, think “outside the box.” His artistic vision may, in retrospect, appear like simplicity itself; but he saw the world differently from most of his contemporaries and, through his art, he forced them to see it differently. Additionally, the success of his techniques and perspectives permitted less confident artists to follow his lead, and he radically altered the marketing of art and the public image of the artist. Such a legacy could be used as a powerful narrative tool to propel Whistler’s story and tell it in new, more intimate ways. A newly structured narrative could make Whistler’s single-minded devotion to art its centerpiece and driving force, the means by which to explain everything else — the mystique, the persona, the private man, the borrowing — from

35 Henry Adams, *The Education of Henry Adams* (1918; New York, 1973), p. 371.

36 Laver, *Whistler*, p. 11. For examples of influences see Robin Spencer, “Whistler, Swinburne and Art for Art’s Sake” and “Whistler’s ‘The White Girl’: Painting, Poetry and Meaning,” *Burlington Magazine* 140 (May 1998), pp. 300–11; Caroline Dakers, *The Holland Park Circle: Artists and Victorian Society* (New Haven, Conn., 1999).

Whistler's point of view. His was a life not to be observed but felt and experienced alongside him. In strictly literary terms, this, too, should be the biographer's goal.

Shortly after Whistler's death, erstwhile friend Edward G. Kennedy snorted, "I could write about Whistler, but I leave that to fools."<sup>37</sup> More than a century later, the task of explaining Whistler and his work remains daunting. Yet the chances of getting it right are improving for those wise enough to tap into the Whistler renaissance, seek out the private Whistler, fashion a new narrative from his artistic legacy, and build on the accomplishments of those courageous biografiends who have gone before us.

37 René Gimpel, *Diary of an Art Dealer*, trans. John Rosenberg (London, 1966), p. 229.

# Creative Connection: James McNeill Whistler and Isabella Stewart Gardner

Linda J. Docherty

Although they have previously figured only marginally in interpretations of one another's achievements, James McNeill Whistler and Isabella Stewart Gardner (1840–1924) bear closer comparison in the cultural context of their time. Born six years apart, the painter and his patron shared Scottish ancestry, celebrity status, cosmopolitan orientation, and a devotion to beauty that informed their respective legacies. Gardner's fame as a collector of European old masters has obscured her connection with the American artist whose aesthetic vision helped to pave the way for modernism. When she conceived her idea for a museum in 1896, however, she owned more works by Whistler than by any other painter. Gardner's interest in her expatriate countryman did not wane when she turned her boundless energy to the building and design of Fenway Court, now the Isabella Stewart Gardner Museum. Quite the contrary, her creative reconceptualization of the art museum attests to her enduring admiration for Whistler's achievement and identification with him as an artist.

Gardner's interest in Whistler's art blossomed in tandem with her relationship with the man. The two met through Henry James in London in 1879 and remained friends until the painter's death in 1903, the year she opened her museum. On Gardner's biannual trips to Europe she and Whistler eagerly sought out each other's company. Surviving letters describe visits to the artist's home and studio, purchases of pictures, and exchanges of gifts as a source of mutual pleasure. "Dear Mrs. Gardner . . . Do come and see us," Whistler urged in 1890. "We have a delightful old house in Cheyne Walk, Chelsea . . . facing the river — and the most charming garden in London! . . . Do come tomorrow. . . . Don't forget."<sup>1</sup> In Paris two years later, Whistler gave Gardner a copy of Stéphane Mallarmé's *Vers et Prose*, for which his lithographic portrait of the poet was the frontispiece. Expressing delight in the artist and his work, she responded with the following note of thanks: "What bad luck, & what good luck! The first that I should lose your visits. . . . The second that I become possessor of the "Vers et Prose" with that wonderful portrait! How kind of you — I am wholly as grateful & appreciative as you are charming to me."<sup>2</sup>

1 Whistler to Isabella Stewart Gardner, July 17, 1890, Isabella Stewart Gardner Museum (hereafter ISGM), GUW 09118.

2 Isabella Stewart Gardner to Whistler, December 4, [1892], GUL G8, GUW 01642.

Scholars have long noted the friendship between Whistler and Gardner, but they have not fully considered its significance. Art history persists in placing the two in separate ideological camps: Whistler among the modernists, Gardner among the guardians of tradition. According to his early biographers, Joseph and Elizabeth Pennell, however, "Whistler believed in carrying on tradition."<sup>3</sup> The old masters he most admired — the Venetians, Velázquez, and Rembrandt — figured prominently in Gardner's museum. While renowned for her Renaissance and baroque paintings, Gardner also collected nineteenth-century art. Works by her contemporaries, Whistler included, held places of honor in her Italian palazzo.

Differences in sources and medium have further obscured the connection between Whistler and Gardner. He drew lifelong inspiration from Japanese art; she identified with Italy. Whistler's work survives almost exclusively in two dimensions; Gardner's is inseparable from architecture. At a deeper level, however, his paintings and her museum exemplify a shared commitment to aesthetic values. By making beauty the leitmotif of their life's work, Whistler and Gardner challenged the materialism and determinism of their time. As artists, both appealed through the senses to the spirit, thereby affirming the power and mystery of imagination.

Gardner established her identity as an artist with the opening of Fenway Court. Calling it "a new departure," Sylvester Baxter observed, "Here, for the first time, the attempt has been made to give an organic unity, fundamentally artistic, to an important collection. The result is a genuine achievement."<sup>4</sup> Mary Augusta Milliken wrote, "[Fenway Court] ... is not a museum.... It is rather a creation — the love of beauty in operation toward a definite and successful end."<sup>5</sup> Henry Adams summed up contemporary sentiment by telling Gardner, "You are a creator, and stand alone."<sup>6</sup> Despite this early praise of Gardner's genius in giving aesthetic form to an idea, perception of her museum subsequently shifted to its contents. Beginning with Gilbert Wendel Longstreet's *General Catalogue* in 1935, a series of museum publications treated individual objects separately, placing emphasis on their makers, materials, and provenance. Although Longstreet aptly described Fenway Court as "the achievement of one person,"<sup>7</sup> within a decade of Gardner's death, study of her collections in isolation had obscured her original purpose and invention.

Today, aided by a theoretically informed art history, Gardner again commands

3 Joseph Pennell and Elizabeth Robins Pennell, "Whistler as Decorator," *Century* 83, (February 1912), p. 500.

4 Sylvester Baxter, "An Interesting Step Forward in Art," *Century* n.s., 43, no 6 (April 1903), p. 960.

5 Mary Augusta Milliken, "The Art Treasures of Fenway Court," *New England Magazine* 33, no. 3 (November 1905), p. 248.

6 Henry Adams to Isabella Stewart Gardner, February 9, 1906, ISGM.

7 Gilbert Wendel Longstreet, *General Catalogue* (ISGM, Boston, 1935), p. 9.

respect and attention as an artist. The feminist critique of hierarchical distinctions between fine and decorative arts paved the way for scholars to examine her museum installations in new lights.<sup>8</sup> Psychoanalytical theories of self-representation have since enabled them to situate Fenway Court in a broader institutional context.<sup>9</sup> Revisionist interpretations of Gardner's museum reveal a symbiosis of artistic imagination and cultural ambition. From this perspective, her well-known affiliations with male artists, writers, and scholars demand reconsideration.

Although Whistler never saw the Isabella Stewart Gardner Museum, he recognized its maker as a kindred creative spirit. In 1899, the year she broke ground for Fenway Court, he sent Gardner another book, *Eden versus Whistler: The Baronet and the Butterfly*. Designed and edited by him, it recounted a precedent-setting legal battle that established the artist's "ABSOLUTE RIGHT ... to control the destiny of his handiwork."<sup>10</sup> Whistler's gift came with the following dedication: "To Mrs. Gardner — Whose appreciation of the work of Art, is only equalled by her understanding of the Artist!"<sup>11</sup> By paying his friend this compliment, in this defense of artistic ownership, Whistler recognized both her taste and her sympathy with his claim.

Gardner manifested her appreciation for Whistler's art early in her career as a collector. In 1886 she commissioned a small pastel portrait of herself, *Note in Yellow and Gold: Mrs. Gardner* (pl. 15), which was completed during a fortnight's stay in London. Flamboyant though she was in person, Gardner had not hitherto posed for a portrait. Her choice of Whistler bespoke both admiration for his talent and trust in the artist as a person. Whistler responded enthusiastically to his friend's request, saying, "to paint the little picture will be a joy."<sup>12</sup> Gardner purchased two more small works from Whistler at this time, a pastel, *The Violet Note* (pl. 16), and an oil on board, *Blue and Orange: The Sweet Shop* (pl. 17). As a group, the portrait, figure study, and city scene illustrated the range of the artist's subject-matter and his abiding fascination with color.

8 See, for example, Anne Higonnet, "Private Museums, Public Leadership: Isabella Stewart Gardner and the Art of Cultural Authority," in *Cultural Leadership in America: Art Patronage and Patronage, Fenway Court 27* (1997), pp. 79–92; and Linda J. Docherty, "Collection as Creation: Isabella Stewart Gardner's Fenway Court," in Wessel Reinink and Jeroen Stumpel, eds., *Memory and Oblivion: Proceedings of the 29th International Congress of the History of Art* (Dordrecht, 1999), pp. 217–21.

9 For example, Anne Higonnet, "The Museum as Self-Portrait," paper presented at "Private Realm and Public Space: The Collector's Museum in the Twenty-First Century: A Clark Symposium," Williamstown, Mass., September 16, 2006.

10 *Eden versus Whistler: The Baronet and the Butterfly* (New York, 1899), p. 79. On the historical significance of this case, see Albert Elsen, "The Artist's Oldest Right?" *Art History* 11, no. 2 (June 1988), pp. 217–30.

11 Whistler to Isabella Stewart Gardner, [1899], ISGM, GUW 09117.

12 Whistler to Isabella Stewart Gardner, [October 1886?], ISGM, GUW 09099.



FIG. 12.1  
*Nocturne, Blue and  
Silver — Battersea  
Reach*, 1872–78,  
Isabella Stewart  
Gardner Museum,  
Boston; YMSM 152.



FIG. 12.2 *Blue and  
Violet. Lapis Lazuli*,  
1885/86, Isabella  
Stewart Gardner  
Museum, Boston;  
M.1070.

Gardner's collection of Whistler's art expanded after 1891 when the French government acquired *Arrangement in Grey and Black: Portrait of the Painter's Mother* (see fig. 6.3) for the Luxembourg.<sup>13</sup> For American admirers, this purchase established Whistler as a "living old master" destined for immortality in the Louvre.<sup>14</sup> Gardner, who inherited \$1.6 million that year, moved quickly to add to her collection. In 1892 she acquired an early seascape, *Harmony in Blue and Silver: Trouville* (pl. 18), which shows Gustave Courbet on the beach in Normandy. Three years later she purchased another oil, *Nocturne, Blue and Silver — Battersea Reach* (fig. 12.1), and a pastel, *Blue and Violet. Lapis Lazuli* (fig. 12.2). Etchings and lithographs, including a complete set of Venice prints, rounded out her Whistler holdings in the 1890s.

At 152 Beacon Street, her Boston residence prior to Fenway Court, Gardner set Whistler's pictures in aesthetic relationship to their surroundings. She placed *The Violet Note* and *Blue and Violet. Lapis Lazuli* on the Red Drawing Room mantel adjacent to the crown jewel of her collection, Titian's *Rape of Europa* (fig. 12.3). This

13 See Margaret F. MacDonald and Joy Newton, "The Selling of Whistler's *Mother*," in Margaret F. MacDonald, ed., *Whistler's Mother: An American Icon* (Aldershot, 2003), pp. 65–79.

14 See Burns, p. 241. On Whistler's reputation and influence in America, see Nicolai Cikovsky Jr. with Charles Brock, "Whistler and America," in Dormont and MacDonald, pp. 29–38; and Merrill, *After Whistler*.

juxtaposition highlighted the chromatic richness and erotic content of the small paintings and linked Whistler to the great Venetian master. Gardner hung *Harmony in Blue and Silver: Trouville and Nocturne, Blue and Silver — Battersea Reach* in the Music Room, next to the grand piano (fig. 12.4). In so doing, she invited concert audiences to enjoy a synesthetic experience of notes and colors. Even before these installations were completed, Whistler expressed approval of Gardner's burgeoning artistry. In an 1895 letter accompanying *Nocturne, Blue and Silver — Battersea Reach* and *Blue and Violet. Lapis Lazuli*, he expressed satisfaction that the works would be "in such brilliant company." Whistler went on to say, "There was a time when I thought America far away — but you have really changed all that!! — and this wonderful place of yours on the Bay ends by being nearer to us than is the Bois



FIG. 12.3 Red Drawing Room at 152 Beacon Street, showing the *Rape of Europa* to the left and *Blue and Violet. Lapis Lazuli* on mantel; archival photograph, ca. 1896, Isabella Stewart Gardner Museum, Boston.

FIG. 12.4 Music Room at 152 Beacon Street, showing *Harmony in Blue and Silver: Trouville and Nocturne, Blue and Silver — Battersea Reach* to left of piano; archival photograph, ca. 1896, Isabella Stewart Gardner Museum, Boston.



to the Boulevards on a summer afternoon.”<sup>15</sup> Gardner’s display of her collections simultaneously paid respect to Whistler’s genius and revealed their mutual interest in exhibition as an art form.

Gardner’s appreciation for Whistler’s art extended to promotion of him for public projects. She strongly supported his efforts to secure a mural commission for the new Boston Public Library, an ambitious and prestigious *Gesamtkunstwerk*.<sup>16</sup> In 1892 Gardner wrote to Whistler to inquire, “Is it decided? About the Library I mean — I am so crazy to have anything so splendid as our great Bates Hall [the reading room] painted by you, that I am too excited to remain in doubt!”<sup>17</sup> When Whistler’s contract offer was withdrawn in 1895 (the wall is still empty), Gardner pursued a second scheme to make the legendary *Peacock Room* (see pl. 4 and pl. 5) part of the library complex.<sup>18</sup> This idea received vigorous support from their mutual friends John Singer Sargent and Vernon Lee. In an 1897 letter, Lee appealed to Gardner saying, “Certainly the Peacock Room is one of the greatest things modern art has produced, and if you can ‘pick up its pieces’ or cause them to be re-created, you will have done a fine thing for the future.”<sup>19</sup>

How Gardner envisioned incorporating Whistler’s interior decoration into the library fabric remains a question. Sargent wanted the work to remain intact. “To my mind,” he told Gardner in 1893, “it would be much better to find a room there as near the right size as possible, so as not to change the arrangement of it.... I think it would be lost in Bates Hall.”<sup>20</sup> As hope began to wane, Sargent became concerned more with possession than presentation of Whistler’s celebrated interior. In 1895 he conceded, “It ought to be kept together, but the shutters alone would be a treasure.”<sup>21</sup> Sargent’s letters suggest that Gardner had a less preservationist vision of bringing *The Peacock Room* to Boston. This would not have been surprising given her subsequent use of architectural fragments: the courtyard of Fenway Court combines balconies from a Renaissance palace and sculptures from a Romanesque church. Equally significant is the fact that Gardner, as far as we know, gave no thought to purchasing *The Peacock Room* for her collection. Had she done so, she would have been forced to make an impossible choice between Whistler’s artistic integrity and her own.

15 Whistler to Isabella Stewart Gardner, [December 1892?], ISGM, GUW 09109.

16 On this failed project, see Deanna Marohn Bendix, *Diabolical Designs: Paintings, Interiors, and Exhibitions of James McNeill Whistler* (Washington, D.C., 1995), pp. 200–203.

17 Isabella Stewart Gardner to Whistler, [November/December 1892], GUL G7, GUW 01641.

18 See Merrill, *Peacock Room*, p. 316.

19 Vernon Lee (Violet Paget) to Isabella Stewart Gardner, September 21, 1897, ISGM.

20 John Singer Sargent to Isabella Stewart Gardner, November 2, 1893, ISGM.

21 John Singer Sargent to Isabella Stewart Gardner, August 29, 1895, ISGM.

When Whistler praised Gardner's understanding of the artist, he alluded to a sympathy that transcended specific works. During a period when art's character and purpose were vigorously contested, these two friends participated actively in the debate on the basis of shared beliefs and values. Whistler's example emboldened Gardner to pursue her aesthetic vision and become a cultural leader in her own right. In public personality, decorative sensibility, and creative principles, she was his true artistic heir.

Gardner's stature as an artist, unlike Whistler's, waned after her death in 1924. While she remained universally recognized as the architect of Fenway Court, her achievement as a collector and philanthropist overshadowed the significance of her museum as a whole. Gender played a role in this diminishment. Praising her bequest to the public, Elizabeth Ward Perkins wrote in *Scribner's Magazine*, "Mrs. Gardner had a genius of an entirely feminine type. It did not directly create, or, rather, combine, from the materials presented to it by the elements; but given any matter already fashioned to beauty — objects of art, textiles, trees, and flowers — her genius for arrangement seized instantly on the fit juxtaposition, the relation and neighborhood for each part of the destined whole."<sup>22</sup> Because Gardner used works by other artists as her medium, her presentation of her treasures appeared appreciative rather than inventive.

Gardner herself was fully cognizant of the originality of her methods, which suited her expressive purposes perfectly. In 1930 the critic Frank Jewett Mather Jr. recalled, "I once wrote her that she had invented a new decorative art the raw material of which was *chefs-d'oeuvre*, and I don't think it displeased her."<sup>23</sup> Mather disapproved of Gardner's project to make individual masterpieces part of a harmonious arrangement, though he granted that she had carried it to "ultimate perfection." He believed museums should isolate fine arts in a way that invited contemplation of the creative spirit that produced them; grouping together decorative arts (and lesser fine arts) might provide an "atmosphere" of enjoyment without making a demand upon the mind. For early visitors to Fenway Court, however, the decorative unity of the interior ensemble embodied its elevating content. One described it as "not a museum, but a true palace of beauty ... a perfectly related whole [made] out of thousands of apparently incongruous fragments from the past set in a modern framework."<sup>24</sup> Another observed, "The visitor leaves ... not so much with the remembrance of the many treasures he has seen but with that of the museum as a perfectly related

22 Elizabeth Ward Perkins, "Mrs. Gardner and Her Masterpiece: The Gift of Fenway Court to the Public," *Scribner's Magazine* 77, no. 3 (March 1925), p. 230.

23 Frank Jewett Mather Jr., "Atmosphere versus Art," *Atlantic Monthly* 146 (August 1930), pp. 174–75.

24 Priscilla Leonard, "Mrs. Gardner's Venetian Palace," *Harper's Bazar* 37 (July 1903), p. 660.

whole — the expression of a noble idea.”<sup>25</sup> In creating “a living message of the beauty in art to each generation,”<sup>26</sup> Gardner aligned herself with Whistler’s artistic ends.

Whistler’s and Gardner’s creative development occurred in a context of profound cultural change. As America evolved from a producer to a consumer society, an ideal of character centered on hard work and self-denial gave way to a cult of personality associated with leisure and self-fulfilment.<sup>27</sup> Artists participated in the redefinition of the self by fashioning public images that could be marketed and consumed. Purveyed by the media, these personae informed reception of their productions. Sarah Burns has shown how in this period “consideration of personality was almost inseparable from appreciation of the artist’s work.”<sup>28</sup> Gardner’s chief art advisor and agent, Bernard Berenson, described her as “Boston’s pre-cinema star.”<sup>29</sup> Like Whistler, she used her celebrity status to attract attention to her art.

A fashionable appearance distinguished both Whistler and Gardner as public personalities. Dandified in demeanor, he took pride in his impeccable attire. Contemporary images of Whistler regularly feature the white lock, monocle, and slender cane that he brandished like a magic wand (see fig. 11.1).<sup>30</sup> Gardner referenced this image of Whistler in Fenway Court’s Long Gallery, which served as her pantheon of historical and artistic notables. In a display case overlooking the central courtyard she placed his carte-de-visite, calling card, and letters; a sketch related to the Six Projects (see 2. *Framing Whistler’s Nudes*, p. 25); and drawings of *The Peacock Room*.<sup>31</sup> This case contains memorabilia of two other Gardner favorites, John Singer Sargent and Dennis Miller Bunker. Yet it belongs essentially to Whistler, whose bamboo walking stick — a gift to Gardner — crowns the whole arrangement.

Whistler similarly highlighted Gardner’s stylishness in *Note in Yellow and Gold: Mrs. Gardner* (pl. 15). Known for her patronage of haute couturier Charles Worth, Gardner wears a tea gown whose details have been obscured and generalized,

25 Sherril Schell, “A Woman and Her Museum,” *The Mentor* (June 1926), p. 25.

26 Olga G. Monks to Bernard Berenson, September 14, 1924, ISGM; in Rollin van N. Hadley, ed., *The Letters of Bernard Berenson and Isabella Stewart Gardner, 1887–1924* (Boston, 1987), p. 668.

27 On this change, see Warren I. Susman, *Culture as History: The Transformation of American Society in the Twentieth Century* (New York, 1984), pp. 271–85.

28 Burns, p. 5; on Whistler’s public persona, see “Performing the Self,” chap. 7, pp. 221–46. On the self-fashioning of pictorialist photographers, see 5. *Whistler as Model* in this volume.

29 Hadley, *Letters*, p. xxiii.

30 See Eric Denker, *In Pursuit of the Butterfly: Portraits of James McNeill Whistler* (Washington, D.C., 1995); and David Park Curry, “Fashion’s Wheel,” chap. 2, in *James McNeill Whistler: Uneasy Pieces* (Richmond, Va., 2004), pp. 26–67.

31 On Gardner’s photograph collection, see Pam Matthias Peterson, “Portraits in Black and White,” *Fenway Court* (1974), pp. 38–45. On the sketch, see Deborah Gribbon, “Whistler’s Sketch of an Unfinished Symphony,” *Fenway Court* (1980), pp. 26–33. On *The Peacock Room* drawings, see Rollin van N. Hadley, ed., *Drawings: Isabella Stewart Gardner Museum* (Boston, 1968), pp. 37–41; and Merrill, *Peacock Room*, pp. 297–98.

as was Whistler's practice.<sup>32</sup> This comparatively loose-fitting costume gained popularity in the 1880s for the new ritual of five o'clock tea.<sup>33</sup> Inspired by the aesthetic dress of Pre-Raphaelite painting, it provided an alternative to and relief from the corset's rigid manipulation of the female body. Tea gowns allowed well-favored women like Gardner to display their natural allure. Whistler portrayed his sitter with the outer garment falling off her shoulders, a sign of her unabashed sensuality.

In behavior as well as appearance, Whistler and Gardner self-consciously distinguished themselves from the crowd. The press repeatedly described them as eccentric, an image they did little to dispel. "Why should not I call my works 'symphonies,' 'arrangements,' 'harmonies,' and 'nocturnes'?" Whistler queried in his essay "The Red Rag." "I know that many good people think my nomenclature funny and myself 'eccentric.' Yes, 'eccentric,' is the adjective they find for me."<sup>34</sup> Boston observers were more intrigued by than critical of Gardner's unconventionality. One reporter wrote glowingly, "Mrs. Jack Gardner is one of the seven wonders of Boston.... She is a millionaire Bohemienne. She is eccentric, and she has the courage of eccentricity.... everything she does is novel and original."<sup>35</sup> Like Whistler, Gardner monitored her public reputation closely and kept a collection of newspaper clippings.

As late nineteenth-century media celebrities, Whistler and Gardner commanded attention by different means. While he aggressively took issue with the critical press, she allowed journalists' imagination free play.<sup>36</sup> An ardent animal lover, Gardner's repeated antics with the lions at the Boston Zoo spawned pictures as well as stories. A contemporary newspaper sketch shows her leading Rex, a full-grown male, around the grounds before a crowd of fascinated spectators.<sup>37</sup> Gardner's dictum "Don't spoil a good story by telling the truth," coupled with her unprecedented activities, kept Boston in a state of endless anticipation.<sup>38</sup> She used mystery and surprise to maximum advantage. In Perkins's words, "The dramatic instinct by which she held the public was equally human and elemental."<sup>39</sup>

32 Aileen Ribeiro, "Fashion and Whistler," in MacDonald and Galassi, p. 44. On Worth, see Jean Philippe Worth, *A Century of Fashion* (Boston, 1928); and Diana de Marly, *Worth: Father of Haute Couture* (New York, 1980). On Gardner and Worth, see Louise Hall Tharp, *Mrs. Jack* (New York, 1965), pp. 40–43; and Douglass Shand-Tucci, *The Art of Scandal: The Life and Times of Isabella Stewart Gardner* (New York, 1997), p. 24.

33 On the tea gown, see Ribeiro, "Fashion and Whistler," p. 32; and De Marly, *Worth*, p. 116.

34 Whistler, *The Gentle Art*, p. 126.

35 Hadley, *Letters*, p. xviii.

36 See Hilliard T. Goldfarb, *Isabella Stewart Gardner: The Woman and the Myth* (Boston, 1994).

37 See Shand-Tucci, *The Art of Scandal*, pp. 26–27; and for the origins of this leonine legend, Morris Carter, *Isabella Stewart Gardner and Fenway Court*, 2nd ed. (Cambridge, Mass., 1925), pp. 160–61.

38 Carter, *Isabella Stewart Gardner and Fenway Court*, p. 31.

39 Perkins, "Mrs. Gardner and Her Masterpiece," p. 235.

Whistler's and Gardner's daring to be different extended to artistic innovation in their respective contexts. Whistler's *japonisme* challenged the Victorian taste for realism and narrative. Gardner's acquisition of European old masters appeared equally unconventional to a Boston enamored of French Impressionism. With regard to art exhibitions, Whistler's quarrel with the cluttered hanging practices of the Royal Academy paralleled Gardner's objection to the museum as a "storage for isolated exhibits" rather than "a place where works of art enhance each other in a due relation."<sup>40</sup> Both believed that art and the presentation of art should present a unified aesthetic vision that appealed to the viewer's imagination.

As artists, Whistler and Gardner shared a decorative sensibility that distinguished their interior designs. Because little of his achievement in this vein survives, this similarity has been overlooked. Whistler told Théodore Duret, "I attach just as much importance to my interior decorations as to my paintings."<sup>41</sup> Gardner believed "a home ... should be in itself a work of art."<sup>42</sup> Both created aesthetic houses that served as settings for their personalities and shrines to beauty in an increasingly tawdry and sordid world. Both further carried their decorative values to the public, he through designs for exhibitions, she through creation of a museum.

In the course of their twenty-year friendship, Gardner visited many of Whistler's residences and may well have drawn specific inspiration from this source. Decorative arts figured prominently in both their interiors. Their forms and colors gave abstract interest to and unified the ensembles. Whistler favored blue-and-white oriental porcelain. In *Symphony in White, No. 2: The Little White Girl* (see fig. 3.5), Joanna Hiffernan contemplates a tall vase on the drawing-room mantel at No. 7 Lindsey Row. A photograph of the room shows Whistler's artfully displayed collection of kakemonos, screens, fans, and curios (fig. 12.5). As originally completed, Fenway Court contained a Chinese Room replete with a similar array of Asian objects (fig. 12.6). In 1914 Gardner converted this space into the Early Italian Room and filled it with Italian primitives (fig. 12.7). In one of her most exquisite installations, Gardner placed Ambrogio Lorenzetti's small panel-painting of Saint Elizabeth of Hungary against an eighteenth-century chasuble. The triangular shape and pale blue hue of this arrangement rhyme with Niccolò di Pietro Gerini's iconic image of Saint Anthony Abbot, which hangs above. Flowers fill Saint Elizabeth's apron and ornament the embroidered vestment, enhancing the effect of unity.

40 Ibid., p. 227.

41 Whistler to Théodore Duret, [ca. 1885], The Metropolitan Museum of Art Archive, letter 16, quoted in Hilary Taylor, *James McNeill Whistler* (New York, 1978), p. 90.

42 Anne O'Hagan, "The Treasures of Fenway Court," *Munsey's Magazine* 34, no. 6 (March 1906), p. 674.



FIG. 12.5 Drawing room at No. 7 Lindsey Row, ca. 1865; from Pennell, *Whistler Journal*, facing p. 152.



FIG. 12.6 Chinese Room at the Isabella Stewart Gardner Museum, showing the *Tale of Genji* screen and Anders Zorn's portrait of Mrs. Gardner; archival photograph, ca. 1903, Isabella Stewart Gardner Museum, Boston.



FIG. 12.7 Early Italian Room at the Isabella Stewart Gardner Museum, showing *Saint Elizabeth of Hungary* and *Saint Anthony Abbot*; Isabella Stewart Gardner Museum, Boston.



FIG. 12.8 Titian Room at the Isabella Stewart Gardner Museum, showing the *Rape of Europa*; Isabella Stewart Gardner Museum, Boston.



FIG. 12.9 *Symphony in Flesh Colour and Pink: Portrait of Mrs Frances Leyland*, 1871–74, ©Frick Collection, New York; YMSM 106.

Decorative arts served not only to tie Whistler and Gardner's interiors together, but also to highlight the beauty of specific works. He believed that "A beautiful picture should be shown beautifully. Therefore it must be hung so it can be seen, with plenty of wall-space round it, and in a room made beautiful by color, by sculpture judiciously placed, by flowers, by furniture and hangings and decoration in harmony."<sup>43</sup> Gardner's installation of *The Rape of Europa* in the Titian Room of Fenway Court exemplifies Whistler's philosophy of picture hanging (fig. 12.8). A rectangle of patterned silk cut from one of her Worth gowns provides a base for the monumental canvas; its silvery green tone draws attention to Europa and the bull. On tables below the painting, an enamel plate and a painted jar echo Titian's curvilinear rhythms. A bronze putto appears to have tumbled out of the frame. By making an individual treasure the centerpiece of a harmonious display of diverse objects, Gardner presented beauty as timeless and inviolable.<sup>44</sup>

In their devotion to aesthetic values Whistler and Gardner eschewed the material excesses and taxonomic impulses of the nineteenth century. *Symphony in Flesh Colour and Pink: Portrait of Mrs Frances Leyland* (fig. 12.9), painted in the drawing room at No. 2 Lindsey Row, provides a sense of Whistler's increasingly spare and serene interior designs. With more sumptuous materials, Gardner achieved similar reposeful effects at Fenway Court. Of the courtyard (fig. 12.10) Sylvester Baxter observed, "The enticing beauty of the scene before us continually draws our eyes toward it.... The effect is inexpressibly tranquillizing. It is remarkable how, after wandering by the hour, subjected to innumerable impressions, this sense of restfulness abides throughout."<sup>45</sup> Visitors to both Whistler's and Gardner's houses had the feeling of entering another world. As decorators, both created harmonious and

43 Pennell, "Whistler as Decorator," p. 509.

44 For a more theoretical reading of this installation, see Anne Higonnet, "Museum Sight," in Andrew McClellan, ed., *Art and Its Publics: Museum Studies at the Millennium* (Malden, Mass., 2003), pp. 133–47.

45 Sylvester Baxter, "An American Palace of Art," *Century*, n.s., 45, no. 3 (January 1904), p. 365.

unified domestic environments that offered spiritual refreshment.<sup>46</sup>

Beyond personality and poetics, Gardner took further inspiration from Whistler's creative principles. She not only talked with him about his art but also avidly collected writings on the subject. Her Whistler holdings included biographies, exhibition catalogues, critical reviews, and accounts of his lawsuits against John Ruskin and William Eden. In 1890 Gardner acquired the first copy of the first deluxe edition of *The Gentle Art of Making Enemies*. Whistler wrote to thank her, saying he was "delighted ... that [she] should have thought of possessing it."<sup>47</sup> The *Ten O'Clock* lecture, the artist's most comprehensive statement of his credo, formed the centerpiece of this prized volume.

As a creator, Whistler valued imagination over facts. In the *Ten O'Clock* lecture, he described the artist as "a dreamer apart," uniquely attuned to nature's poetic aspects. Whistler explained, "When the evening mist clothes the riverside with poetry, as with a veil, and the poor buildings lose themselves in the dim sky, and the tall chimneys become campanili, and the warehouses are palaces in the night, ... Nature, who, for once, has sung in tune, sings her exquisite song to the artist alone, her son and master."<sup>48</sup> *Nocturne, Blue and Silver—Battersea Reach*, in Gardner's collection, could well serve to illustrate this passage.

Gardner was similarly inclined to see material reality transformed. Upon receiving a portrait thought to be of Isabella d'Este, she wrote to Berenson, "Isabella d'Este is here.... She and Rembrandt [in an early self-portrait] held quite a little reception



FIG. 12.10 Courtyard at the Isabella Stewart Gardner Museum, looking southeast; Isabella Stewart Gardner Museum, Boston.

46 On the spiritual aspect of Whistler's art, see Kathleen M. Pyne, "James McNeill Whistler and the Religion of Art," chap. 3 in *Art and the Higher Life: Painting and Evolutionary Thought in Late Nineteenth-Century America* (Austin, Tex., 1996), pp. 84–134.

47 Whistler to Isabella Stewart Gardner, [July 17, 1890], ISGM, GUW 09118.

48 Whistler, *The Gentle Art*, p. 144.

this afternoon. I had some delicious music. When that was over, the devotees put themselves at the feet of the lady and the painter."<sup>49</sup> Gardner's propensity to speak of her portraits in human terms shaped the perceptions of visitors to Fenway Court. In the Dutch Room (fig. 12.11), where she staged formal dinners, Gardner and her guests kept imaginative company with monarchs, aristocrats, and artists. Of this imposing space, John LaFarge wrote, "One is suddenly reminded of the existence of certain important people, and also of the painters who painted them."<sup>50</sup> Mary Augusta Milliken observed, "Here, against the rare faded green brocade of the walls, the works of Dutch, Flemish, and German masters are as much at home as if the old knights and burgomasters were real 'ancestors' still inhabiting their own castle."<sup>51</sup>

While imagination was an impetus to creativity, Whistler's and Gardner's art depended equally on aesthetic choice. Whistler maintained that "Nature contains the elements, in colour and form, of all pictures, as the keyboard contains the notes of all music. But the artist is born to pick, and choose, and group with science, these elements, that the result may be beautiful."<sup>52</sup> Gardner's installation of her collections at Fenway Court exemplified a process of selection and arrangement that accorded with this description of the creative act. In the Veronese Room (fig. 12.12) she emphasized the coloristic quality of her four small Whistler paintings by placing them on a wall of gilt and painted leather and beneath Giovanni Domenico Tiepolo's *The Wedding of Frederick Barbarossa to Beatrice of Burgundy*.

The meticulousness with which Gardner calculated her designs becomes apparent if we compare the current configuration of these pictures to a photograph published shortly after the museum opened (fig. 12.13).<sup>53</sup> As originally positioned, *Note in Yellow and Gold: Mrs. Gardner* was pulled slightly to the left of the other Whistler works. This subtle separation gave the portrait due distinction while preserving the horizontal line. By strengthening the vertical connection between Tiepolo's *Wedding* and *The Violet Note*, it created a second, contrapuntal grouping. The Veronese Room exemplifies not only Gardner's embrace of Whistler's aesthetic principles but also her competitive inclinations. In *The Peacock Room*, Whistler had painted over Frederick Leyland's Spanish leather to complement *La Princesse du pays de la porcelaine* (see pl. 4). At Fenway Court, Gardner brought antique wall covering and Whistler's modern art together in a harmonious interior design.

49 Hadley, *Letters*, p. 52.

50 John LaFarge and August F. Jaccaci, eds., *Noteworthy Paintings in American Private Collections*, vol. 1 (New York, 1979), p. 63.

51 Milliken, "Art Treasures of Fenway Court," p. 244.

52 Whistler, *The Gentle Art*, pp. 142–43.

53 On Gardner's attention to detail, see Mather, p. 174.



FIG. 12.11 Dutch Room at the Isabella Stewart Gardner Museum, southeast view showing old master portraits; archival photograph, ca. 1904, Isabella Stewart Gardner Museum, Boston.



FIG. 12.12 Veronese Room at the Isabella Stewart Gardner Museum, showing four small Whistler paintings (Plates 15–17 and Fig.12.2) below Tiepolo's *Wedding of Frederick Barbarossa*; Isabella Stewart Gardner Museum, Boston.



FIG. 12.13 Veronese Room at the Isabella Stewart Gardner Museum, showing four small Whistler paintings (Plates 15–17 and Fig.12.2); from Anne O'Hagan, "The Treasures of Fenway Court," *Munsey's Magazine* 34, no. 6, March 1906, p. 677; Photo: Isabella Stewart Gardner Museum, Boston.

The attention both Whistler and Gardner lavished on the details of their art bespeaks enthusiastic absorption in the creative process. "The artist," Whistler declared in the *Ten O'Clock* lecture, "delights in the dainty, the sharp, bright gaiety of beauty . . . in fulness of heart and head, [he] is glad, and laughs aloud, and is happy in his strength." He went on to say, "Art and Joy go together, with bold openness,

and high head, and ready hand—fearing naught, and dreading no exposure.”<sup>54</sup> The word “joy” also appears frequently in Gardner’s writings about the act of making art. She sensed this quality in Titian’s work when *The Rape of Europa* arrived in Boston. “I am breathless about the Europa!” she reported to Berenson, “Every inch of paint in the picture seems full of joy.” Envisioning her own project, she added, “I think I shall call my Museum the Borgo Allegro. The very thought of it is such a joy.”<sup>55</sup> After the work had begun, she wrote to a friend in Chicago, “I am building a new house on the Fenway. I made the plans myself and it has been and is a great pleasure and interest.”<sup>56</sup> Gardner’s coat of arms, emblazoned over the main doorway of Fenway Court, confirms this account of her experience as an artist. Often interpreted as a proclamation of will, her motto, “*C’est mon plaisir*,” expresses equally a creative delight validated by Whistler’s principles.

After his death in 1903, Whistler retained a central place in Gardner’s memory and art. When British and American admirers conceived plans to build a public memorial to the artist, they appealed to her for financial support. Having recently paid \$200,000 in customs duties and made major purchases, Gardner was running her museum under severe monetary constraints, and in 1907 she responded regretfully to a request from William Heinemann, Whistler’s publisher. She closed on a positive note by saying, “It is a good thought, also, that Whistler needs nothing to make him remembered.”<sup>57</sup> As Gardner approached the end of her life, however, commemoration became part of her museum project. In 1914 she dismantled the two-story music room on the east side of the building and created a new complex of galleries for permanent art display. Continuing to use works of art as her means of expression, Gardner gave aesthetic form to personal remembrance. The remodeling project included the Spanish Chapel, a memorial to her son, Jackie, who had died in infancy, and the Buddha Room (now destroyed), a subterranean temple inspired by her friendship with Japanese curator and writer Okakura Kakuzô (see 7. *Whistler’s Japanese Connections*, p. 102). Adjacent to these spaces, she designed the Yellow Room as a tribute to Whistler and his art.

This intimate gallery, to the left of what is now the museum’s public entrance, originally served as a reception room for visitors. Works on paper, including Whistler prints, adorned the walls; across the hall a companion space, now the Blue Room, contained

54 Whistler, *The Gentle Art*, p. 153.

55 Hadley, *Letters*, p. 66.

56 Isabella Stewart Gardner to Frances Glessner, August 6, [1901], ISGM.

57 Isabella Stewart Gardner to William Heinemann, February 18, 1907, ISGM. On Whistler and Heinemann, see Patricia de Montfort, “Whistler and Heinemann: Adventures in Publishing in the 1890s,” *The Whistler Review* 2 (2003), pp. 64–73.



FIG. 12.14 Yellow Room at the Isabella Stewart Gardner Museum, east wall; Isabella Stewart Gardner Museum, Boston.

her Whistler landscapes and other modern paintings. In changing reception rooms to galleries, Gardner gave Whistler a place of prominence (fig. 12.14). The Yellow Room epitomizes how his art and example provided inspiration for her creative work.

The room's design visually recalls Whistler's exhibition principles. Paintings are hung at eye level with breathing space around them and united by a dominant color note. The yellow damask wall fabric sets the room apart from the rest of Fenway Court and harkens back to memorable Whistler installations. Yellow had been the keynote of *Harmony in Yellow and Gold: The Primrose Room*, a model interior designed with E. W. Godwin for the 1878 Universal Exposition.<sup>58</sup> It was also Whistler's choice for a groundbreaking exhibition of Venetian etchings held at London's Fine Art Society in 1883.<sup>59</sup> This so-called *Arrangement in White and Yellow* was recreated for exhibition in numerous cities in America, including Boston. Gardner's copy of the catalogue can be found at Fenway Court.

In contrast to the Blue Room (fig. 12.15), where works by Gardner's friends extend up to the ceiling, pictures on the main walls of the Yellow Room form a single line. A similar arrangement had distinguished the "Whistler Wall" at the first exhibition of the International Society of Sculptors, Painters, and Gravers in 1898 (fig. 12.16).<sup>60</sup> Boston's 1904 Whistler Memorial Exhibition emulated the artist's ideas for hanging pictures and making them part of a unified ensemble. Gardner not only

58 See Bendix, *Diabolical Designs*, pp. 164–66.

59 See David Park Curry, "Total Control: Whistler at an Exhibition," in Ruth E. Fine, ed., *James McNeill Whistler: A Reexamination, Studies in the History of Art 19* (Washington, D.C., 1987), pp. 77–78; Bendix, *Diabolical Designs*, pp. 223–31; Kenneth John Myers, *Mr. Whistler's Gallery: Pictures at an 1884 Exhibition* (Washington, D.C., 2003), pp. 10–12; and Curry, "Coda," chap. 8 in *Uneasy Pieces*, pp. 316–29.

60 See Bendix, *Diabolical Designs*, pp. 260–62.

FIG. 12.15 Blue Room  
at the Isabella Stewart  
Gardner Museum,  
southwest corner;  
Isabella Stewart Gardner  
Museum, Boston.



FIG. 12.16  
“Whistler Wall,”  
First International  
Exhibition of the  
Society of Sculptors,  
Painters, and Gravers,  
1898, Pennell  
Collection, Library  
of Congress,  
Washington, D.C.

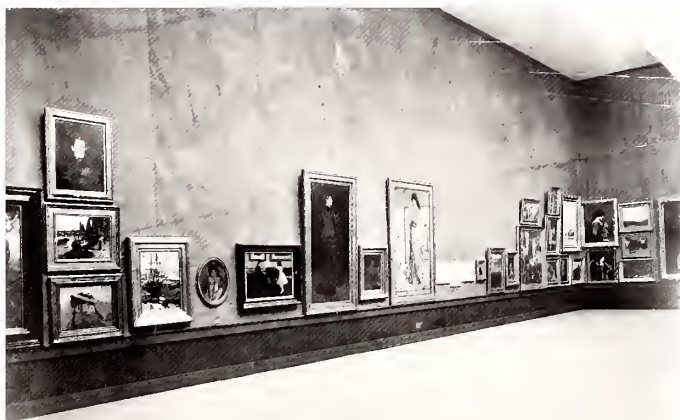


FIG. 12.17 Yellow  
Room at the Isabella  
Stewart Gardner  
Museum, west wall;  
Isabella Stewart  
Gardner Museum,  
Boston.



saw this ambitious retrospective but also served on its Honorary Committee.<sup>61</sup>

While formally evoking memorable Whistler exhibitions, the Yellow Room abounds in synesthetic associations, which he loved to cultivate. Souvenirs of Gardner's musical passions provide a fitting accompaniment to *Harmony in Blue and Silver: Trouville and Nocturne, Blue and Silver — Battersea Reach*. Cases along the walls display letters, manuscripts, photographs, drawings, and other relics of musicians, many of whom were Gardner's friends. Opposite the entrance, she placed an eighteenth-century viola d'amore given to her by the violinist and composer Charles Martin Loeffler on her birthday in 1903.<sup>62</sup> Sargent's portrait of Loeffler, the centerpiece of the west wall (fig. 12.17), was also a birthday gift to Gardner in the year she opened Fenway Court.<sup>63</sup> The musical setting she created for Whistler's tonal paintings added a personal note to the Yellow Room's iconography.

Other objects in the Yellow Room symbolically situate Whistler in an international history of art. Between the seascapes on the east wall, Edgar Degas's *Portrait of Madame Gaujelin* represents the contemporary painter Whistler most admired. Across the room, Dante Gabriel Rossetti's *Love's Greeting* serves as a reminder of the artist's early association with the Pre-Raphaelite Brotherhood (see 3. *Apostles of the New Gospel*); Gardner purchased this work from the estate of Frederick Leyland, original owner of *The Peacock Room*. Thomas Wilmer Dewing's *Lady in Yellow* exemplifies Whistler's influence on American artists, in this case through the portrait of his mother. On the south wall, Henri Matisse's *The Terrace, St. Tropez* signals the continuation of Whistler's decorative colorism in the twentieth century. More than a visual complement to Whistler's work, Gardner's selection of paintings recalls the artist's history and anticipates his legacy.

By no means can every object in the Yellow Room be tied directly to Whistler, yet his art sets the tone for the ensemble. In his 1897 review of a Grafton Galleries Exhibition of Dramatic and Musical Art, Henry James described the world of Whistler's art as one "of distinction, of perception, of beauty and mystery and perpetuity." He wrote, "The effect of Whistler at his best is exactly to give to the place he hangs in ... something of the sense, of the illusion, of a great museum. He isolates himself

61 See "Whistler Memorial Exhibition," *Nation* 78, no. 2014 (February 4, 1904), pp. 88–89; Kenyon Cox, "The Whistler Memorial Exhibition," *Nation* 78, no. 2018 (March 3, 1904), pp. 167–69; Maurice Baldwin, "The Whistler Memorial Exhibition," *New England Magazine* 30, no. 3 (May 1904), pp. 289–99; and Lee Glazer, "Whistler, America, and the Memorial Exhibition of 1904," in Merrill, *After Whistler*, pp. 86–96.

62 On Gardner and Loeffler, see Ralph P. Locke, "Charles Martin Loeffler: Composer at Court," *Fenway Court* (1974), pp. 30–37. On his gift to Gardner, see Jennie Hanson, "Charles Martin Loeffler and the Eberle Viola d'amore," *Fenway Court* (1984), pp. 41–43.

63 Gardner had earlier expressed a desire for Dennis Miller Bunker to paint Loeffler in the manner of Whistler's *Arrangement in Black: Portrait of Señor Pablo de Sarasate* (see fig. 8.3). Isabella Stewart Gardner to Charles Martin Loeffler, September 28, 1890, ISGM.



FIG. 12.18 John Singer Sargent, *Mrs. Gardner in White*, 1922, Isabella Stewart Gardner Museum, Boston.

in a manner all his own; his presence is in itself a sort of implication of a choice corner.”<sup>64</sup> Gardner owned a copy of this review and may well have conceived the Yellow Room — certainly a choice corner at Fenway Court — with their mutual friend’s words in mind. In paying special respect to Whistler she added luster to her museum and commemorated a long and influential friendship.

Scholars have long recognized Berenson’s impact on Gardner as an art collector, but her achievement as a creator bespeaks a greater debt to Whistler. In his public personality, decorative sensibility, and creative principles he provided a model of the modern artist that suited Gardner’s personal tempera-

ment and served her cultural ambition. Gardner’s last portrait, Sargent’s 1922 watercolor (fig. 12.18), represents the maturity of a creative character that her friendship with Whistler had helped to bring to life. Writing to Loeffler, Gardner referred to the ethereal painting as “the symphony in white.”<sup>65</sup> This Whistlerian allusion exemplifies her propensity to identify with his example without abdicating her authority.

Gardner’s relationship to Whistler bears telling comparison to that of the artist’s most important American patron, Charles Lang Freer. As collectors both were attracted early on to Whistler’s art. As philanthropists both founded museums that celebrated beauty in its essential aspects, collapsing boundaries of chronology and culture. Toward Whistler, Freer was ever the respectful gentleman. He generously lent pictures to important exhibitions, patiently waited for the artist to complete commissions, and, in forming his collection, willingly accepted responsibility as “the appointed guardian of [the artist’s] reputation.”<sup>66</sup> With characteristic aptness,

64 Henry James, *The Painter’s Eye*, ed. John L. Sweeney (Cambridge, Mass., 1956), p. 259.

65 Isabella Stewart Gardner to Charles Martin Loeffler, September 15, 1922, ISGM.

66 Linda Merrill, ed., *With Kindest Regards: The Correspondence of Charles Lang Freer and James McNeill Whistler, 1890–1903* (Washington, D.C., 1995), p. 33.

Whistler inscribed Freer's copy of *Eden versus Whistler*, "To Charles Lang Freer, a determined friend."<sup>67</sup>

Gardner was a radically different temperament whose egocentricity, determination, and possessiveness rivaled Whistler's own. While he complimented her "appreciation of the work of art" and "understanding of the artist," their wills collided when it came to actual paintings. In 1892 Gardner forcibly removed *Harmony in Blue and Silver: Trouville* from the artist's Paris studio after he refused to relinquish it as promised.<sup>68</sup> She also denied (or simply ignored) requests to borrow her pastels for exhibitions, loans he had, at least in one case, counted on.<sup>69</sup> Whistler, possibly in retaliation, subsequently thwarted Gardner's desire to purchase "the Red Bunnie" (*Red and Black: The Fan*, see fig. 1.14) by telling her that he had promised it to someone else.<sup>70</sup> Gardner bought no more pictures from Whistler after 1895, and the works she did own remained permanently installed at Fenway Court. As a collector of paintings, she could not govern his behavior, but as a creator of aesthetic environments, she made his art her own.

While Whistler inspired Gardner as an artist, she pursued her own creative ends. Her materials were more diverse in physical character and cultural origin, her installations more iconographically allusive and personally expressive. Whistler scoffed at the idea of art as a means of moral improvement. Gardner was too much a product of Boston, and of Harvard art-history professor and cultural critic Charles Eliot Norton, to abdicate social responsibility altogether. From Norton, Gardner had imbibed the belief that beauty was both a warrant of and an impetus to goodness, and she conceived her philanthropic project in these terms. The museum she built "for the education and enjoyment of the public forever" was not sternly didactic, however, but imaginatively alluring. In this sense, it embodied Whistler's spirit.

Both Whistler and Gardner claimed absolute control over their creations. While his interiors and exhibitions were largely ephemeral productions, she determined to leave a lasting legacy. Gardner's stipulation in her will that her museum's general disposition could not be altered has preserved visual evidence of her artistic debt to Whistler, a debt confirmed by surviving correspondence. Recognition of their creative connection enlarges understanding of both Whistler's influence and Gardner's innovation. In a manner he would have appreciated, she transformed the art museum from a "storage for isolated exhibits" into a work of art.

67 Merrill, *With Kindest Regards*, p. 125 n. 8.

68 Carter, *Isabella Stewart Gardner and Fenway Court*, pp. 135–36.

69 Whistler to Isabella Stewart Gardner, [October 31, 1886?], [December 1892?], February 1901, ISGM, GUW 09114, 09109, 09115; and Whistler to Edward Guthrie Kennedy, July 10, [1892], New York Public Library, GUW 09692.

70 Whistler to Rosalind Birnie Philip, [July 26, 1897], GUL P352, GUW 04712.



# Ambition, Hopes, and Disappointments: The Relationship of Whistler and His Mother as Seen in Their Correspondence

Georgia Toutziari

Anna McNeill Whistler (1804–1881) (fig. 13.1), best known as the sitter for the famous painting, *Arrangement in Grey and Black: Portrait of the Painter's Mother* (see fig. 6.3), has often been portrayed as strict, severe, humorless, and fanatically religious. In reality Anna was a cultivated woman who kept up with current affairs, but most importantly she was a prolific correspondent whose writings reveal a wealth of historical information relating to social, economic, literary, and art-historical subjects in nineteenth-century America, Russia, and England. Her letters also shed light on the close relationship between mother and son, formed in a family context that was often threatened by economic instability, deaths, and transatlantic travels, which, as history proved, made the family stronger and resilient to fluctuations of fortune.

An examination of the relationship between James McNeill Whistler and his mother reveals how Anna's domestic identity, reinforced by professions of piety, affected her son's work and reputation as an artist. She played an important role in his artistic career, including the promotion and marketing of his work, for she understood, to a surprising degree, the workings of the London art world, particularly issues of patronage, collecting, public exhibition, and the commercialized art market.

Whistler and his mother lived together in London from 1863 until 1875 — a period of intense, highly deliberate artistic experimentation for James. During this time he produced some of his finest works: *At the Piano* (see fig. 4.8),<sup>1</sup> his first picture shown at the Royal Academy, depicting his half-sister Deborah Delano and his niece Annie Haden; *Wapping* (fig. 13.2); *Nocturne: Blue and Silver — Chelsea* (fig. 13.3); and finally the portrait of his mother. The mother–son relationship that is revealed in their correspondence during this time sheds light on these artistic achievements and the context in which they occurred.

Early on, mother and son had established a habit of moralistic conversation that was a reflection of close family bonds. Anna Whistler inhabited a world in which her daily routine, her very sense of self, was determined by her relationship with, and status within,

1 YMSM 24.



FIG. 13.1 Anna Whistler, ca. 1860s, Special Collections, Glasgow University Library.

her home and family. A deeply devout Episcopalian, she had been brought up in the early nineteenth century when evangelical revivals were spreading on both sides of the Atlantic.<sup>2</sup> These revivals contributed to new attitudes about social behavior and the role of women, most significantly embodied in the phenomenon of the “cult of true womanhood” in which a white middle-class woman’s identity was, in most cases, associated with the virtues of piety, purity, submission, and domesticity.<sup>3</sup> Although these values limited women’s public role, they also implied a certain amount of domestic power: women, especially Christian mothers, were called by preachers to raise the next generation of virtuous citizens. And indeed, these clergymen helped formulate a new definition of female

character. As the American Reverend Abbott declared, “Mothers have as powerful an influence over the welfare of future generations, as all other earthly causes combined.”<sup>4</sup>

Anna Whistler’s belief that “women were called by God to be good” was reflected in her writings. In 1849, when James was only fifteen years old, she wrote to him concerning a newly wed relation: “If she can be firm in principle & piety, her light may guide others to choose the straight road, and God will bless the union if she be the faithful witness for Jesus in her intercourse with the old world.”<sup>5</sup>

2 See Mark Noll, David W. Bebbington, G. A. Rawlyk, eds., *Evangelicalism: Comparative Studies of Popular Protestantism in North America, the British Isles, and Beyond, 1700–1990* (New York, 1994); Richard Carwardine, *Transatlantic Revivalism, Popular Evangelicalism in Britain and America, 1790–1865* (Westport, Conn., 1978); David W. Bebbington, *Evangelicalism in Modern Britain: A History from the 1730s to the 1980s* (London, 1989); Marilyn J. Westerkamp, *Women and Religion in Early America, 1600–1850: The Puritan and Evangelical Traditions* (London, 1999), pp. 131–32.

3 See Barbara Welter, “The Cult of True Womanhood, 1820–1860,” *American Quarterly* 18 (1966), pp. 151–74. Also see Nancy F. Cott, *The Bonds of Womanhood: “Woman’s Sphere” in New England, 1780–1835* (New Haven, Conn., 1977); Carol Smith-Rosenberg, “The Female World of Love and Ritual: Relations Between Women in Nineteenth-Century America,” *Signs* 1, no. 1 (Autumn 1975), pp. 1–29; Glenna Matthews, *Just A Housewife* (New York, 1987).

4 John S. C. Abbott, *The Mother at Home, or The Principles of Maternal Duty* (Boston, 1834), p. 159.

5 Anna McNeill Whistler to Whistler, December 22, 1848, January 1 and 4, 1849, GUL W374, GUW 06378.



FIG. 13.2 *Wapping*, 1860–64, John Hay  
Whitney Collection, Image courtesy of the  
Board of Trustees, National Gallery of Art,  
Washington, D.C.; YMSM 35.



FIG. 13.3 *Nocturne: Blue and Silver — Chelsea*,  
1871, Tate Britain, London, ©2007; YMSM 103.

One of her earliest surviving letters to her son, written in 1844, shows how Anna exercised (possibly unconsciously) her virtuous power over James:

*You know not how those lines to your mother touched her heart this morning! so full of the holy sentiment of a child's affection & duty to her who ten years ago folded him with joy in a maternal embrace, her heart then as now full of thankfulness to God for the gift. Now let me pour out some of the hopes which your promises of becoming dutiful & gentle have caused to spring up in my heart. Oh how full it was when the surprise at breakfast met my eye, my tears could scarcely be restrained & had I followed the impulse of my feelings I should have left my seat to embrace you my dear, dear boy! But my heart mounted to God in thankfulness as I contrasted your healthful appearance on this birthday with your pale cheek on the last! Oh James my darling boy let me beseech you never to forget your dependence upon Him.*<sup>6</sup>

Anna Whistler's religious lifestyle, modeled after her own mother Martha's example, involved studying biblical scriptures on a daily basis and taking early morning prayers with her children. She wrote in 1851:

*I rise with the sun & get Willie up by 6 o'clock, so it is time to cover the nut fire, sun up our account for another day, to our Master in heaven. I need not assure you our best loved absent one, that we each pray for you in private as in the family devotions, but remember dear Jemie, none can work out your sanctification but yourself!*<sup>7</sup>

For Christian mothers in the nineteenth century, the work of redemption had to begin

6 Anna McNeill Whistler to Whistler, [July 11, 1844], GUL W351, GUW 06355.

7 Anna McNeill Whistler to Whistler, September 23 and 24, 1851, GUL W397, GUW 06401.

early, and the home became the main arena for religious education.<sup>8</sup> Anna Whistler tried to set her children a good example, writing: "Seek first the kingdom of God & His righteousness & all else shall be added to you[.] Mrs Eastwick told me in May with tears of thankfulness to God, of Joe having been Confirmed! Why may I not rejoice of you? Am I not a Christian Mother? have I not trained you faithfully?"<sup>9</sup>

Clearly, Anna tried to bestow upon her children the Christian doctrine, contrasting the virtues of heaven with the vices of the world. Impressed with a sense of the transitoriness of life, she wondered that people could be so taken with what she looked on as vanities, including money, position, and grand houses, and she used her virtuous powers — domesticity imbued with religion — to influence her sons, particularly James. Before he left for Europe in 1855, this was what he was brought up with, and this is what faced him when his mother reunited with him in London in 1863.

Her other son, William, followed her to England a year later and set up his medical practice in the British capital. Although she initially hoped to live with both her sons, their professional obligations made it impossible. William Whistler's small income, and his need for modest lodgings and a patients' waiting room, did not allow for the provision of chambers for his mother. Consequently, Anna Whistler entered James's bohemian house at No. 7 Lindsey Row in December 1863, where she lived for some ten years. Paradoxically, Anna's piety and virtuous character became useful to James when they lived together, for she became his housekeeper, agent, personal assistant, and religious mentor. Her London writings reveal a busy life set in a domestic environment. As she wrote in 1872: "I am the only one to receive callers in this house or to ensure [answer] notes, or attend to the daily domestic cares, having only young thoughtless Servants who need my watchful guidance & following up their headlessness [heedlessness]."<sup>10</sup>

When discussing Anna Whistler's life in London, it must be emphasized that she equated religion and domesticity. Both virtues were constructed and distributed from the arena of her home. "Home," in this context, was never really associated with a permanent physical location: Anna lived in many different places but never settled in any of them. It is this idea of home that Ruskin, for example, talked of in his lecture "Of Queens' Gardens" in 1864; he described home as a "sacred place,

8 See Jan Lewis, "Mother's Love, The Construction of an Emotion in Nineteenth-Century America," in Rima D. Apple and Janet Golden, eds., *Mothers and Motherhood: Readings in American History* (Ohio, 1997), pp. 52–71 (at p. 54).

9 Anna McNeill Whistler to Whistler, November 26 and 27, 1854, GUL W441, GUW 06446. It is not known if Whistler was ever confirmed.

10 Anna McNeill Whistler to Catherine ("Kate") Jane Palmer, May 21–June 3, [1872], Princeton University Library, Department of Rare Books and Special Collections, GUW 09938.

a vestal temple” guarded and inspired by representatives of “pure womanhood.”<sup>11</sup> This home, according to Ruskin, was a state of mind, and it is a similar state of mind that we have to take into consideration when we are looking at Anna Whistler’s relationship with her son.

In her married life, Anna had played a role of virtuous submission, but she developed a different persona when her husband died in 1849. Although she had initially opposed her son’s artistic ambitions, she nevertheless ended up being his agent in a foreign land. She wrote to his patrons on Whistler’s behalf, establishing a critical role in the relationship with Frederick Richards Leyland. Leyland commissioned portraits of himself (pl. 19), his wife, and four children over a period of eight years, and in 1869 Anna wrote to Leyland, at the time her son’s most important patron:

*My dear Mr Leyland*

*You will be surprised at my writing you for Jemie, as, in the usual course of either business or friendship he would himself do so, but he feels too keenly his disappointed hopes. Yesterday the conviction was forced upon him that he should only ruin his work by persevering now in vain endeavours to finish your picture & that he must set it aside til he should be in better tone, mortifying tho it be to him, that it is not to be exhibited this Season. he is poor fellow more to be pitied than blamed, if mortal energy & industry could have accomplished it, his might, he has worked so hard night and day to attain his ambition, his first motive to please you who have been so indulgently patient, & also that it might have had a place in the new R Academy[,] he has only tried too hard to make it the perfection of Art, preying upon his mind unceasingly it has become more & and more impossible to satisfy himself.*

*Yesterday afternoon I was surprised by his coming to see me, as he has been too closely at work to spare time even to cheer me, but he said in explanation, “All Sons I believe come to their Mother in their difficulties, to ask help & find comfort” and then with his characteristic frankness he entered upon the details of his trying position, for he always confides in his Mother, who thus knows intimately all his failings & his virtues. “Leyland must be written to! but I cannot do it! You can dear Mother for me.... Say to Leyland that on my return to Chelsea, I will finish the two pictures he has ordered, before I begin any others, only beg him to believe I have not failed to do so before now, from lack of endeavor to gratify his wish and my own.*

The picture to which James was referring was probably *The Three Girls* (1867–76, whereabouts unknown; YMSM 88) and another unidentified work from the decorative scheme the Six Projects, commissioned by Leyland in 1867, two years before this letter was written, but never completed (see 2. *Framing Whistler’s Nudes*, p. 25).

<sup>11</sup> John Ruskin, *Sesame and Lilies: Three Lectures* (London, 1895), 10th edition, p. 108.

What is of interest here is the way in which Anna Whistler completed the letter:

*You may judge dear Mr Leyland how painful is this task to me, for tho my experience of blighted hopes in this world has taught me to expect disappointment.... I failed in my argument to convince him that he should profit by the day of rest, not only to recover tone, but to seek the blessing promised to obedience. Surely the 4th Commandment is as binding as any others upon Christians.*<sup>12</sup>

The extent of Leyland's religious belief is not clear, but his wife, Frances, was certainly a devout Christian; she and Anna Whistler had formed a close relationship, prompted, perhaps, by their common spiritual and religious wants. As Anna revealed:

*I went on Wednesday last to hunch at the Leylands & then to the Maitlands again to hear Lord Radstock [an evangelical preacher], it is to me "a revival" so impressive is his discourse. In a conversation he had with Mrs Leyland, when all but ourselves had gone to the tea room. he related his religious experience, & that an illness from which his doctors said in his hearing, he could not recover, had caused such heart searching, tho an outward member of the Church, he had not given himself to his Saviour but when raised up from that illness, he resolved to be known in the world as His servant, he gave up music even, as it had been his passion, for he felt sure of heavenly harmonies! Oh how like a brother he urged the lovely Mrs Leyland to make sure her hopes of heaven! We are DV to go again Tuesday to hear him....*<sup>13</sup>

In addition to such excursions into evangelical preaching, Anna Whistler looked after Leyland's daughters when they were ill in 1869 and prepared their lunches when they were posing for her son. Frances Leyland, in turn, provided Anna with food when she was ill.

An abiding theme in Anna's letters is how she maintained her family's infrastructure through her control of their domestic lives. Yet it was precisely that domestic arena that allowed her, in the 1860s and early 1870s, to move within a circle that included prominent artists, poets, merchants, bankers, and so on. This period may have been the first time that mother and son were so close to one another, and their intense domesticity may have inspired the creation of Anna Whistler's portrait (see below, p. 214).

Anna's role as attentive mother and presiding spirit of the family appears to have been fully accepted by James. In 1869, after six years of living with her son, she wrote in an authoritative tone to Leyland, "I am his representative in Chelsea & shall welcome a call from you, if you have time to spare."<sup>14</sup> There are numerous incidents in the correspondence where we see Anna facilitating her son's career,

12 Anna McNeill Whistler to Frederick Richards Leyland, March 11, [1869], PWC 34A/1/1, GUW 08182.

13 See note 10 above. DV, "DeoValente," God willing.

14 See note 12 above.

drawing on the value of her domestic situation to establish her bona fides as a good and pious woman, indeed a woman that a gentleman such as Leyland could trust to favorably influence a disobedient son such as James. It is clear that James used his mother to his advantage in dealing with patrons. For example, when in 1872 Leyland asked Whistler's opinion of a picture he was considering buying (the portrait of a soldier, known as *The Corregidor of Madrid*, whereabouts unknown), Anna wrote as follows:

*My dear Mr Leyland.*

*Jemie wishes me to write at his side, of his having been this morning to examine more carefully the Picture, of which he wrote you last night his first impression, his feeling of responsibility as to the opinion he had given, disturbed him early to rise & go at once to Howell, and they together went to see the picture, he has just come back & while he works I am his Amanuensis.... If a Velasquez at all (which he doubts greatly) it is not one containing the beauties either in color or execution of that great Master. the Drawing is very weak & the lovely grey tones are supplanted by curious brown-reds, that he does not know in Velasquez, besides which there is an awkwardness in parts of the execution that makes them rather heavier than I like —*

At this point James joins his mother in writing, addressing Leyland as "my dear Baron."<sup>15</sup> (Leyland subsequently bought the painting, though its attribution was seriously in question.)

The friendship between the Leylands and the Whistlers continued for a few good years despite James's failures to produce the commissioned works. In 1877, however, the relationship ended in the well-known quarrel over *Harmony in Blue and Gold: The Peacock Room* (see pl. 4 and pl. 5), Whistler's decorative scheme at Leyland's London house at 49 Prince's Gate. Leyland never paid Whistler his full asking price, believing that Whistler had exceeded his commission. In an extreme disavowal of his mother's ideas of domestic sanctity, Whistler invited friends and the press into Leyland's home without Leyland's consent.<sup>16</sup> This ended the relationship between artist and patron for which Anna Whistler had labored for years. Given Anna's close relationship with the Leylands, it does not come as a surprise that she expressed her resentment of her son's behavior and wrote, "a gentlemen [*sic*] private residence is not an exhibition!"<sup>17</sup>

<sup>15</sup> Anna McNeill Whistler and Whistler to Frederick Richards Leyland, August 23, [1871], PWC 6B, 23, G UW 11867.

<sup>16</sup> Merrill, *Peacock Room*, pp. 251–52; also see Whistler's publication germane to the room, *Harmony in Blue and Gold, The Peacock Room* (London, 1877).

<sup>17</sup> Anna McNeill Whistler to Mary Emma Harmar Eastwick, July 19, 1876, PWC 34/79-82, G UW 12635.



FIG. 13.4 Thomas De Kay Winans, ca. 1870, Special Collections, Glasgow University Library.

Anna Whistler had not only played an important role as an intermediary between James and Leyland. From the very first stages in his career, she had always encouraged James to keep on good terms with all his patrons to gain further commissions. In 1857, when James was still in Paris, she instructed him to write to Thomas De Kay Winans (fig. 13.4) and Joseph Harrison, social connections from Russia.<sup>18</sup> Winans became Whistler's first major patron and bought several paintings, including *Wapping*. In addition, personal friends of Anna's such as James Gamble and Kate Livermore bought and collected her son's works and negotiated prices with her. In 1868 she wrote to James Gamble, who had

probably bought Whistler's first set of etchings (the French Set):

*Upon reflection it seems to me that you perhaps might not have indulged in so expensive a set of Etchings had you known of their rise in price since the French set were offered our friends at two guineas! for tho our Artist has no value for his juvenile productions, they may be as pleasing generally as his Thames Etchings.... So I propose "splitting the difference" & that you receive again the cheque & reduce it to half.*<sup>19</sup>

Anna Whistler played the role of agent and dealer. Neither her sense of self, determined by her relationship with, and status within, her family, nor the boundaries of the home restricted her from taking an active role in James's professional life. Thus, it is not surprising that she showed a keen understanding of the value of exhibitions and other strategies for marketing art, referring often to the annual London season in May and June and to Sunday open visits to artists' studios.<sup>20</sup> In 1872 she

18 See Anna McNeill Whistler to Whistler, April 30 and May 4, [1857], GUL W467, GUW 06472; Anna McNeill Whistler to James H. Gamble, [October 16/30, 1858], GUL W473, GUW 06478.

19 Anna McNeill Whistler to James H. Gamble, November 22, [1868], GUL W534, GUW 06540.

20 For an illustration of Whistler visiting an artist's studio, see Leonée Ormond, *George du Maurier* (London, 1969), p. 110; and "Picture Sunday," *Punch* (April 9, 1887), p. 171. For an analysis of the nineteenth-century studio as an artist's work place, setting for the execution of portraits and instruction to other pupils, see Ronnie L. Zakon, *The Artist and the Studio in the Eighteenth and Nineteenth Centuries* (Cleveland, Ohio, 1978).

explained to her friend James Gamble, “it is part of the routine fashionable in ‘the London Season’ to call at Artists Studios, Sunday afternoons, as their only day to admit visitors.”<sup>21</sup>

Anna Whistler supported James’s ambitions to achieve success at exhibition venues such as the Grosvenor Gallery, the Royal Academy in London, and the Paris Salon. As she revealed: “We are in the pressure of the Season, & he begins work directly after our eight ocl breakfast regularly. he is perfecting the portrait of Mr Leyland & trying to finish a beautiful life size of Mrs L, the pictures must be sent to the Royal Academy the 1st or 2nd day of April, though the Exhibition is not to be til a month later.”<sup>22</sup>

In addition to her role as impresario, she also occasionally served as an actual studio assistant, as when she helped him produce *Nocturne: Blue and Silver — Chelsea*. Again, she seems to have been able to empathize with her son’s rushes of inspiration. In November 1871, she wrote to her sister Kate in Stonington, Connecticut, “he was inspired to begin a picture & rushed upstairs to his studio, carrying an easel & brushes, soon I was helping by bringing the several tubes of paint he pointed out that he should use & I so fascinated I hung over his magic touches til the bright moon faced us from the window.”<sup>23</sup> Anna was sixty-seven years old at the time, and it is unlikely that many elderly mothers in the nineteenth century would be bringing their sons tubes of paint. The episode demonstrates the dedication of the mother to her son.

It was Anna Whistler’s belief that one must work hard and have powers of self-denial; as she had written to James years earlier in May 1854, when he was at West Point:

*God has awakened me to work with Him & while I have breath I shall continue to exert a Mother’s authority towards the two spared me. Jemie my first born! your affection always encourages me to hope you will abide by your fathers wish — his opinions, his example, & that you will strengthen your brother, by your self denial. Oh if you could know the humiliation his & your stooping for money has inflicted, you would henceforth (as he thro mortification has been brought to resolve — refuse to accept from any but your natural & lawful guardians. Your popularity among Cadets or Collegians how dearly purchased, by the loss of the good opinion of old friends. & how dearly purchased is the revelry, which gossip echoes to torture the bruised spirit of a disappointed Mother.*<sup>24</sup>

Nevertheless, Anna Whistler frequently admitted that “a mothers love is not

21 Anna McNeill Whistler to James H. Gamble, November 5 and 22, 1872, GUL W546, GUW 06553.

22 Anna McNeill Whistler to James H. Gamble, March 13, 1872, GUL W542, GUW 06548.

23 Anna McNeill Whistler to Catherine Jane (“Kate”) Palmer, November 3–4, 1871, PWC 34/67–68 and 75–76, GUW 10071.

24 Anna McNeill Whistler to Whistler, May 29 and 30, 1854, GUL W434, GUW 06439.

lessened by the increase to her anxiety.”<sup>25</sup> It was this mother’s love that made her sit for James when a youthful model did not turn up in 1871. As she confessed: “I was not as well then as I am now, but never depress Jemie by complaints, so I stood bravely, two or three days whenever he was in the mood for studying me. his pictures are studies & I so interested stood as a statue!”<sup>26</sup>

This comment illustrates well Anna’s belief that a devoted mother serves her children, and never complains publicly about the burden. As she noted, she was always available for her son, “whenever he was in the mood for studying me.”<sup>27</sup> However, this submissive character could become assertive when her own children, and in particular James, were concerned. James’s feelings toward his mother were, no doubt, ambivalent. The title of his mother’s portrait may give priority to pictorial elements (*Arrangement in Grey and Black*), but its psychological interest can not be denied, despite Whistler’s protestations: “To me it is interesting as a picture of my mother; but what can or ought the public to care about the identity of the portrait?”<sup>28</sup>

Clearly, the public did care — and continues to do so: the Whistler centenary exhibitions in Glasgow in 2003 and the new edition of Anna Whistler’s letters, published online in conjunction with James Whistler’s correspondence, should draw further scholarly attention to their relationship.<sup>29</sup> Although Whistler claimed that the public ought not to care about such mundane matters as maternal and filial devotion, the correspondence shows that he knew better, and we must assume that James Whistler and his mother, despite their different ambitions, hopes, and disappointments, would be pleased to know that their relationship has shed new light on his art.

25 Anna McNeill Whistler to Whistler, September 23 and 24, 1851, GUL W397, GUW 06401.

26 See note 24 above.

27 Ibid.

28 Pennell, *Life*, vol. 1, p. 169.

29 GUW; see [www.whistler.arts.gla.ac.uk/correspondence](http://www.whistler.arts.gla.ac.uk/correspondence).





ABBREVIATIONS AND  
FREQUENTLY CITED SOURCES

*Abbreviations*

- C** The Art Institute of Chicago, *The Lithographs of James McNeill Whistler*, vol. 1, *A Catalogue Raisonné*, edited by Harriet K. Stratis and Martha Tedeschi; catalogue entries by Nesta R. Spink, Harriet K. Stratis, and Martha Tedeschi, essays by Katharine Lochnan. Vol. 2, *Correspondence and Technical Studies*, edited by Martha Tedeschi; essays by Nicholas Smale and Harriet K. Stratis; contributions by David Kiehl and Kevin Sharp. Chicago: The Art Institute of Chicago in association with the Arie and Ida Crown Memorial, 1998.
- GUL** Glasgow University Library. Unless stated otherwise, this refers to the Whistler Collection, Special Collections.
- GUW** *The Correspondence of James McNeill Whistler, 1855–1903*, edited by Margaret F. MacDonald, Patricia de Montfort, and Nigel Thorp; including *The Correspondence of Anna McNeill Whistler, 1855–1880*, edited by Georgia Toutziari. Online edition, Centre for Whistler Studies, University of Glasgow, 2003. <http://wwwwhistler.arts.gla.ac.uk/correspondence>.
- K** Edward G. Kennedy, *The Etched Work of Whistler*. New York: Grolier Club, 1910.
- M** Margaret F. MacDonald, *James McNeill Whistler: Drawings, Pastels, and Watercolours. A Catalogue Raisonné*. New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1995.
- PWC** Pennell-Whistler Collection, Manuscript Division, Library of Congress.
- YMSM** Andrew McLaren Young, Margaret MacDonald, Robin Spencer, and Hamish Miles, *The Paintings of James McNeill Whistler*. New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1980.

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**Merrill, After Whistler** Merrill, Linda, et al., *After Whistler: The Artist and His Influence on American Painting*, High Museum of Art, Atlanta, in association with Yale University Press, 2003.

**Pennell, Life** Elizabeth Robins Pennell and Joseph Pennell, *The Life of James McNeill Whistler*, 2 vols., London and Philadelphia, 1908. References are to this edition unless stated otherwise.

**Pennell, Whistler Journal** Elizabeth Robins Pennell and Joseph Pennell, *The Whistler Journal*, Philadelphia, 1921.

**Whistler, The Gentle Art** James McNeill Whistler, *The Gentle Art of Making Enemies*, 2nd ed., revised, London, 1892.

**Wildenstein** Daniel Wildenstein, *Claude Monet: Biographie et Catalogue raisonné*, 5 vols., Lausanne, 1974–91.

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